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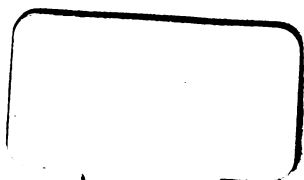
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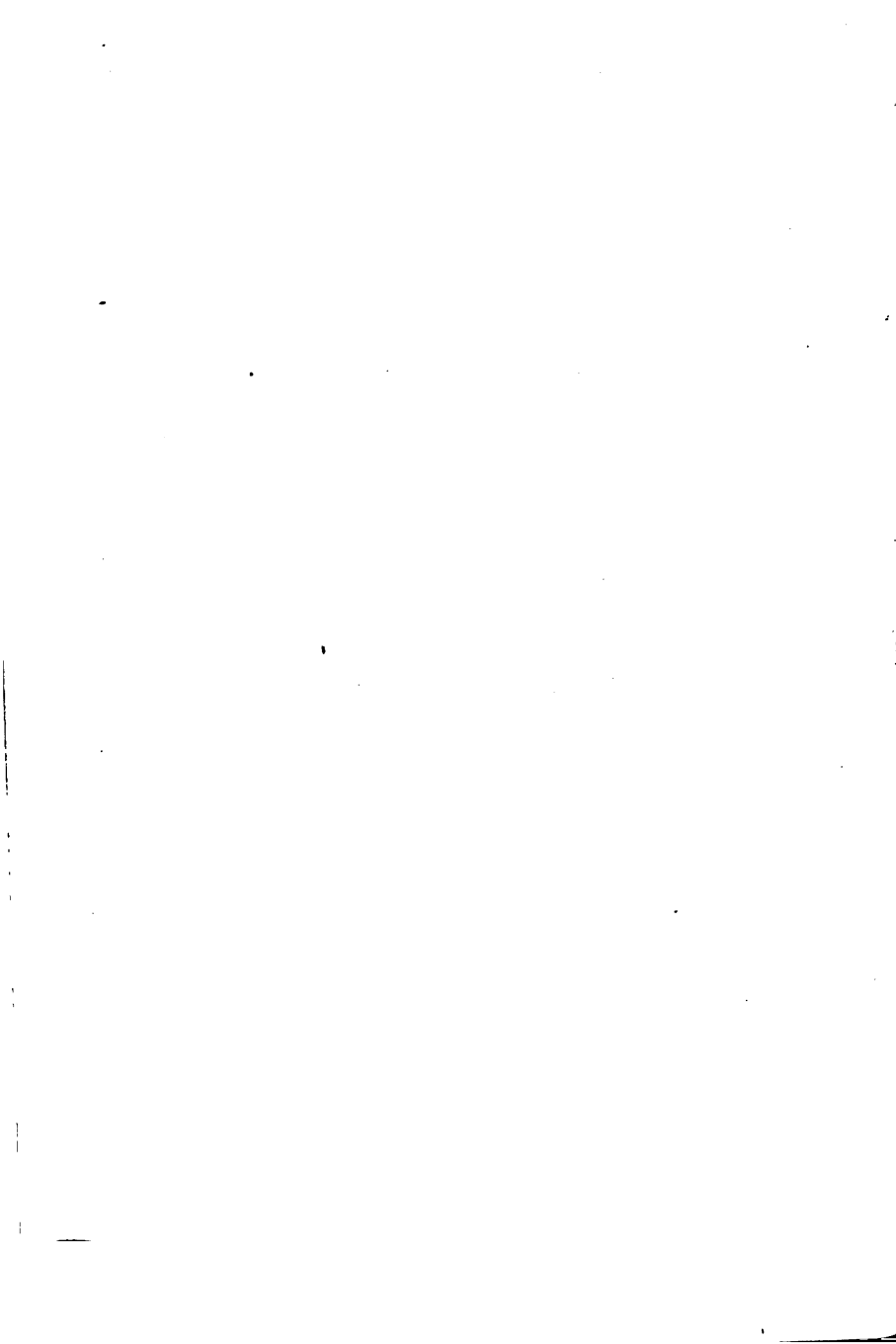
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Heat
England
(Shetlands)



A Sturdy Little Northland

*A Tribute to
the Shetlanders*

By
T. HAROLD GRIMSHAW



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JENNINGS & GRAHAM

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TO
Little Sunlocks

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FOREWORD

The sketches that make up this little book are the afterglow of a unique and beautiful experience. As a missionary in their sea-girt isles I learned to know the Shetland folk—simple, kindly, valorous, and good. And remembering all their loving kindness to me, out of the fullness of my heart I write of the grit, the invincibility, and the nobility in the lives of this great, golden-hearted people.

T. H. G.

*The Parsonage,
Pinole, California.*



A Sturdy Little Northland

I

A Sub-Arctic Trip

ON the evening of the twenty-eighth of April, nineteen hundred and nine, the good ship *St. Giles* threw off her mooring at Leith, Scotland, and glided gently down the Firth of Forth. It was a night superb. The sea had a glasslike smoothness, the atmosphere was crisp and bracing. The old moon beamed down upon us in all her silver splendor, and constellations of twinkling stars sang their silent songs o'erhead. Until the ozone of the sea reminded us of the warm berth below did we drink in the charm of that glorious night. Morning dawned, and we awoke in the harbor of the "Granite City"—Aberdeen. Following breakfast of fish-cakes, toast and coffee, and an hour ashore, the syren blew, hawsers slackened, telegraph bells jingled, en-

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gines rumbled, and soon again it was Northward Ho! Keeping "near in," as sailors say, we had a fine view of the Scottish coast and noted many places of interest, including Peterhead with its convict prison and giant crane. Late in the day the hazy shore faded away, and once again the shades of night fell upon us. Soon a stiff breeze came down from the north, and with the breeze white caps grew until we were sailing a choppy sea. Then came that waste of angry waters, the stormy Pentland Firth. Our good ship so far had behaved herself, but now she began to duck and to dive like some gigantic cormorant. Every now and then black smoke poured from her smokestack, as though getting up strength for more terrible capers. Never did I see a steamer roll about so much. One minute her propeller would be flying round in mid-air and her fo'c's'le half under water. The next, she would rise like some great sea monster and menace the white-crested ocean regiments. Even at this remote date the doings and happenings of that night stand out boldly in my

A Sub-Arctic Trip

memory. It was well-nigh ten o'clock when the last of us tried, and tried desperately, to get below. It was with utmost difficulty that we slid down the companion-way and like drunken men made our way to the fo'c's'le. It might have been the Black Hole of Calcutta, judging from the groans that met us. Like a nightmare do I remember the hours that followed. Lying in semi-darkness in none too comfortable bunks, and in quarters that were swinging and swaying and pitching and tossing, surrounded by groans and sighs and moans and cries, we longed as never before for morning. Suddenly came a bang like the detonating of dynamite. What on earth could it be? Like a veritable cinematograph one's mind produced pictures of a hidden reef; then an iceberg; then collision. Fellow-passengers were tumbling from their bunks, and Johnson and Smith and Hammond in their frantic race for the deck fell over each other, and then up and on to the companion-way, which, to their excited brain, seemed to be purposely eluding them—but they were seeking it at the

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wrong end of the fo'c's'le. Yet nothing very serious had happened—only a great billow had struck us. And our ship, though she had quivered and trembled under the blow, was not to be beaten. Soon she rode high to the crest and, sliding down the other side, hurried on. Ever and anon would come a similar shock, but none so big as that one. Good ship! What a fighter she was! With her one hundred and eighty horse power she battled bravely throughout that formidable night, and when the morning dawned we were near the land again and were thankful.

But this time 't was a new old land; rugged, jagged, sterile, wind-lashed, and storm-beaten; one, the first sight of which inspires the traveler to quote:

“A waste land—

Where no one comes, or hath come
Since the making of the world.”

A land always the same, but of qualities opposite. A barren land—a flowery land. A bad land—a good land. A poor land—a rich

A Sub-Arctic Trip

land. One where desolation and solitude reign—one where truest friendship dwells. A strange patch of rocky isles, ocean-girt and blizzard-swept—but nevertheless a charming land. It was “Ultima Thule.”

II

“Ultima Thule”

“Grim outpost, where the wild waves sweep
Along the midnight deep;
The hero of a thousand wars,
And crowned with stars.
The stranger gives thee tribute due,
Dark sea-caves, skies of blue,
And cliffs that tower to heaven above;
I give thee love.”

HANGING from the Arctic Circle like so many pendants from a necklace, are several islands and groups of islands. The largest and most northerly of them all is that silent and mysterious land—Iceland; with its famous Thingvalla, its volcanoes, its geysers, and deserts which are more barren than the deserts of Siberia. A few miles southeast of Iceland lie the Faroe Islands with their quaint capital—Thorshaven. Like Iceland, they are a dependency of Denmark and are exceedingly

“Ultima Thule”

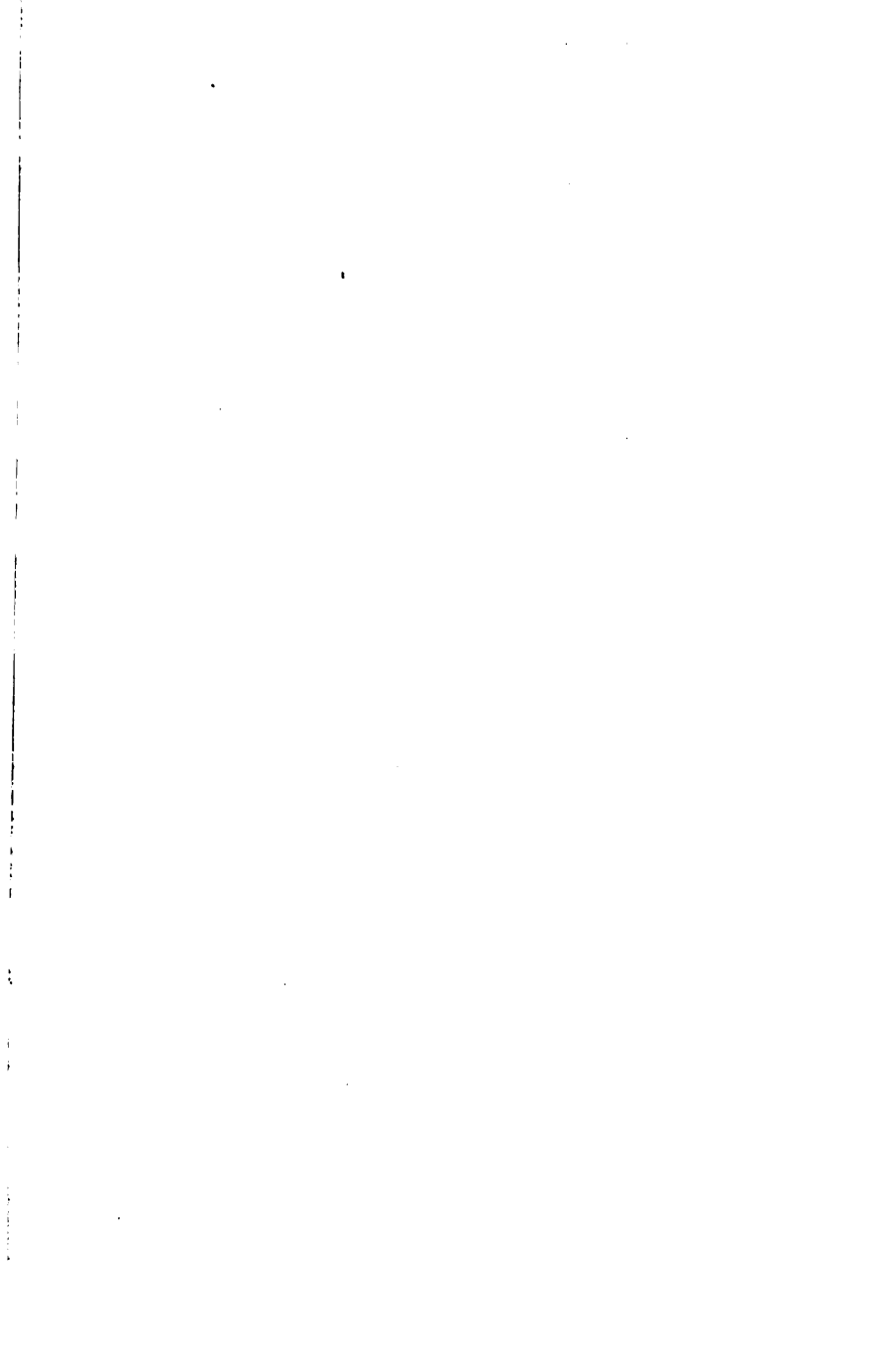
sterile and rugged. Still further southeast there lies “Ultima Thule”—a group of islands known to the early Roman explorers as “*Dispecta est Thule*,” or “farthest point of known land.” Undoubtedly they thought it was the “farthest north,” and really it is very far north. But for the kindly influences of the Gulf Stream, these isles would be more frigid than Labrador. Their latitude is between 60° and 61° N. Traveling on the same degree of latitude in a westerly direction, one would pass through Northern Canada and Alaska. Thule is further north than Cape Farewell in Greenland, St. Petersburg in Russia, and almost as far as Dawson City in the Yukon.

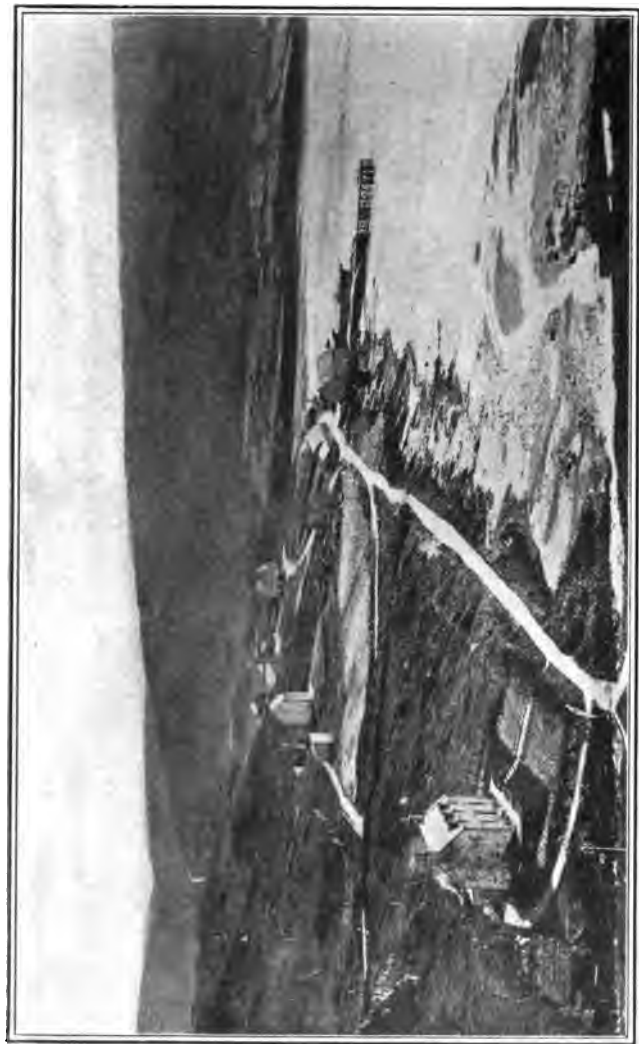
Thule, or Shetland, as it is now called, is really a Norse country and once belonged to the Norwegian crown. Both the Orkney and Shetland Islands were presented to Britain as the wedding dowry of Margaret of Norway, who married James III of Scotland. The annexation took place in the year 1468. It is a little world of itself, full of interest, novelty and romance, and consists of one hun-

A Sturdy Little Northland

dred islands, only thirty of which are inhabited. The larger and those of interest are Mainland, Yell, Unst, Fetlar, and the lonely isle of Foula. Mainland is a scraggy, jaggy, skeleton-like isle, about seventy miles in length, and nowhere more than six miles wide. There is a spot near to the Parish of Brae called Mavis Grind, where one can cast a stone from the east coast into the sea on the west coast. Yell and Unst are next in size and are commonly called the "North Isles." Fetlar is exceedingly rocky and is noted for a special breed of the famous Shetland ponies. The inhabitants of this island are unusually tall. Foula is the lone sheep of the flock, it being very poor and isolated.

Shetland is a land of rugged grandeur. Nowhere in Great Britain is its rock scenery surpassed. In some places cliffs rise sheer out of the sea a height of thirteen hundred feet. All the islands are of Silurian slate, with the exception of Fetlar and Unst, where large surfaces of granite are exposed. The coast is much indented, its indentations resembling





IT IS A WOEFULLY STERILE LAND

“Ultima Thule”

the fjords of Norway. Were the “voes” (bays) and lochs studded with trees, the scenery would equal that of Killarney. Shetland is often classed with Scotland, but this should not be done, as it is a different land in many respects. The Orkney Islands were at one time (in all probability) a part of Scotland, but not so with Shetland. Even the rock strata is different. In Scotland and Orkney it is of horizontal formation, but in Shetland, as in Faroe and Iceland, it is almost perpendicular. Shetland is extremely hilly, hardly can it be said to be mountainous. Ronas Hill—the highest peak—is 1,475 feet. It is not always visible, often being draped with mist, and in winter appearing like a snow-capped sentinel against the gray of the arctic sky. The hill-surface is invariably peat, and is dotted everywhere with the granite boulders of supposed glaciological origin. It is a woefully sterile land, scarcely an apology for a tree growing anywhere on its bosom. Beautiful heather, bearing myriad pink flowers, is God’s carpet for this land, and often one finds a sprig of

A Sturdy Little Northland

the rarest white. In summer the banks of the burns are garlanded with primroses, with sometimes a solitary bluebell. There is also a species of yellow lily growing where fresh water flows. The lochs and burns are teeming with brown trout, and in the fall one may hook a fine sea-trout. Here is the home of the cormorant. Amid the wildest tumult of a winter's gale he can be seen taking his "constitutional," bobbing up and down on the seething waters. Here, too, is the haunt of the seagull, including some rare kinds which are protected. The natives oftentimes make friends with them, and it is said that in Lerwick (the capital town) a seagull sits on every chimney-pot. Often the streets fairly echo with their shrill haunting cries. One visitor says: "The shrill, long-drawn cries are to Lerwick as the chattering of the sparrows to London. Every house has its own familiar gulls and every street its own bands of gulls. They never mix. The children of each house call the gulls names and feed them every day; and every seagull knows what is meant for him.

“Ultima Thule”

No gull attached to one house ever seeks to eat the food scattered from the house next door. So all day long the seagulls hover and cry over the roofs of Lerwick. Should a person come across a pile of rice laid out on the roadway, that one would step over it with care. He or she would know that it had been placed there for some pet gull. At night the gulls leave their own appointed chimney-pots and fly gracefully away to their nesting-places on the rocks of the Isle of Noss.” Occasionally flocks of eider-ducks migrating from Iceland pass overland, and at rare intervals an eagle is seen. In the “voes” one sometimes gets a glimpse of a shark, and sometimes a whale, but outside whales are frequently seen in shoals. Porpoises and seals are also quite numerous. All over the islands the Shetland pony is seen, and there are thousands of sheep.

The climate here is a freak climate; sometimes more charming than California, though oftentimes much akin to the Labrador. There is much rain, much fog, much snow, and very little sunshine; but when the sunny days *do*

A Sturdy Little Northland

come, they are enchanting. A schoolmistress from London, in charge of a Shetland school, writes: "Life is so very narrow here. One's horizon is so fearfully limited. That is one of the defects of Shetland; but I suppose it has its compensations—the summer, for instance. That, however, I have to take on hearsay, for the weather till now has been frightful. It is a most elusive thing, this summer; it reminds one of 'Alice in Wonderland,' who had jam to-morrow and jam yesterday, but never jam to-day."

The capital city of this rocky archipelago is Lerwick—the queerest and quaintest town that ever was built. Coming in from the ocean by way of Bressay Sound, one wonders where the means of locomotion are. Streets there seem to be none. One visitor says "that it seems as though the buildings had at some time danced a jig and then had sat down any way and anywhere." Upon landing, the buildings are found to be all huddled together, with a few very narrow streets. Some of the houses at the south end are so near the sea that the

“Ultima Thule”

waves break on their gable ends. But Lerwick is not merely quaint and lacking in modernity. The beautiful town hall with its clock and peal of bells is worthy of much admiration. It is said that this is the finest building in all the northern islands and the most ambitious of their modern architecture. It is of Gothic style, and both inside and outside are elaborately decorated. The beautiful stained-glass windows present portraits of the kings and queens of Norway. The sweet-sounding bells of the tower were cast at the famous foundry of Van Aerschodt, of Louvain, in Belgium. In a word, this attractive little civic structure is a “historic memorial of the past thousand years.” Then there is also the Central Public School—as fine a building as ever was built for so small a city. Also there is a fine new fish mart, and excellent harbor works.

On a sunny summer-day the town and harbor present a most beautiful sight, especially if viewed from some points on the North Road or from the Isle of Bressay. I can never forget cycling in one day from the country, and

A Sturdy Little Northland

suddenly coming in full view of the scene. The sun was shining in his strength and the sky was as blue as an Italian sky. In the harbor there lay at anchor a variety of steamers and wind-craft with sails flying in the breeze. It was exquisite. Lerwick is a wonderful little town in many respects. In the summer it has the full appearance of a regular cosmopolitan city. Its nominal population is about five thousand, but in the fishing season—from April to September—it steadily rises to twenty thousand. Talk about American “hustle!” The push and business-like spirit of Lerwick during this period compare quite favorably. About four hundred steam “herring drifters” visit the port annually, exclusive of sail-trawlers. Fishermen of many climes here dispatch their varied catches. Shetlanders, Faroese, Icelanders, Scots, Englishmen, Dutchmen, Germans, and Scandinavians, are all to be seen in the motley throng. Then there are the herring stations, where hundreds of girls—native, Scotch, and Swedish—are employed “gutting.” It is very interesting to visit one of these stations and

“Ultima Thule”

to watch these skilled workers, dressed in sea-boots, oil-skins, and sou'westers, with a sharp knife in hand and their fingers wrapped in cotton to ward off the action of the salt. It is amazing to witness how quickly and deftly these girls dispatch the internals of Mr. Herring. Here they work from daylight to dark, and often beyond the dark. The fish are first brought from the drifters and placed in a large box on legs, called a “fäurlin.” The girls then set to work on them in “crews.” A “crew” is made up of three—two “gutters” and one “packer.” They live together throughout the season in houses of six or eight rooms, four or five girls sharing the same room. Their wages are abominably low, being only \$2.50 per *week*, with coals found and extra for overtime. Lassies, only “Shetland lassies,” but every one of them a heroine! Among the hills 'neath the dear straw roofs are aged fathers and mothers, maybe crippled with rheumatism, sitting by the common peat fire, their latter days made bright alone by this love-toil of their girls.

A Sturdy Little Northland

Scalloway, a quaint village of some eight hundred inhabitants, is the old capital and is about seven miles southwest of Lerwick. Here are the ruins of an ancient castle built by Earl Patrick Stewart in the year 1600. The Shetlander has no good word for the builder. Sir Walter Scott in his "Pirate" says, "Folk speak muckle black ill of Earl Patrick." There is still to be seen the big iron ring from which the Earl used to hang all the "bits o' bodies that wadna do something he bade them."

The "farthest north" town is North Røe, and it takes a Shetlander to pronounce the latter half of its name. Here is the nearest Wesleyan Methodist Church to the North Pole—the writer having preached there several times. What Nome is to Alaska, North Røe is to Shetland. Five miles from here is "Fettable," the grandest piece of rock scenery on all this rugged coast—an ocean battlefield in very truth. This is the farthest point of land in longitude one degree west of Greenwich; further north there is only eternal ice and snow.

Walls, too, is an interesting village, and

“Ultima Thule”

Voe, and Aith, and Vidlin, and Brae, and many others too numerous to mention.

This wonderland—I call it such because I found it such—is just so full of interest and novelty that it would take a thick book to describe it all. Let it suffice in this brief sketch to say that it has a charm, a peculiar charm, of its own; one leaves this land with deepest regret and remembers it with love and longing.

“O Shetland, thy wild, rugged grandeur delights me,
Thy dark-frowning crags ever lashed by the waves;
A halo of glory forever surrounds thee,
Thou home of the hero, thou land of the brave.”

III

The Folks and Their Ways (I)

THE Shetland people are folks of the sea, and there are no better folks in all the world than seafolk. Their life is one of hardship and toil, peril and chance; and the sternness of it all brings out all that is good and virile in them. The sea runs in their blood, and they love it and fear it. Its music to them is life; its harvests, their daily bread. And a rare happy life it is to live among them.

The aggregate population of the thirty inhabited islands is about twenty-nine thousand people. They are a hardy race of sturdy Norse extraction. The accent in their talk is distinctly Scandinavian. It is thought that they still retain much of the likeness to the old vikings. Tudor says: "A finer race from a physical point of view than the Shetlanders would



A SHETLAND PEASANT AND A KISHIE OF PEATS



The Folks and Their Ways

be hard to find. One can almost fancy, when standing at one of the fishing stations amongst these tall, keen-eyed fishermen, that the crews which manned the longships of the viking fleets have somehow come to life again; so little has the old Norse type been changed, as far as the peasantry are concerned. Good-looking, handsome even at times as are the menkind, one occasionally sees amongst the women faces of the most beautifully refined cast, such as are to be found rarely, if ever, elsewhere amongst people of the same rank of life in the British Isles."

They live mostly on small "crofts," or farms, reclaimed from the barrenness. The houses are built of stone, mostly one-story, with wooden, tar-felt covered roof, though many still retain the old straw thatch. There are but two, or three rooms at the most; both living-room and parlor (butt and ben) containing beds. The floor is of earth, and seldom level. The inside of the roof is jet black, and the walls are generally whitewashed, though sometimes papered. Windows are prettily cur-

A Sturdy Little Northland

tained and the geranium adds its cheeriness. In every house one sees the "spinning-wheel," often two or three or four, for they too are bread-winners. The furnishing is very scanty, consisting of white-wood chairs and table, and a sea-chest or two. A kerosene lamp serves as illuminator, for during the winter the nights are dark and long. In December and January the sun sets about two-thirty in the afternoon, and does not rise until near ten in the morning. But in mid-summer it is light all the time, and one can sit in the house at midnight and write a letter without the aid of artificial light. Occasionally there are to be seen in these homes sights strange indeed to southern eyes—a sickly calf or baby lamb brought in from the cold and tied to the table-leg, or chickens and ducks that seem to have a license to scavenge where they will.

Shetland can boast no coal-mines, and not much is imported. There are no trees, therefore little wood, and none to burn. Peat is burned universally. It is first "cast" or cut out of the hills, then "cured" or dried in the sun

The Folks and Their Ways

or wind, and finally stacked and thatched for the winter's supply. All over the land one can see the little black stacks which are indeed examples of native skill in the perfect thatching. The oldest houses have the fire in the middle of the floor, with a hole in the roof to let out the smoke. If it should happen that the wind is in the wrong direction, it goes out at the *door*, but that does not matter. This central fire is now becoming somewhat rare. In most homes the fireplace is at the end of the house, with a chimney made of wood. A curious fact is that these primitive fires seldom go out. My last night in this land was spent in a home where the fire had been burning for thirty years and never once been out. At bedtime the red-hot peats are drawn together and several big new pieces of peat are laid on them, then the whole is covered with ashes. In the morning the new pieces have become bright red, and then the hearth is cleaned of ashes, and more new peats are added to the red ones. So the fire burns on from year to year.

I must not give the impression, by this de-

A Sturdy Little Northland

scription of Shetland homes, that all Shetlanders are poor. Many of them, it is true, live in the most pitiable poverty. Several come to my mind now, too, who live (?) on a shilling a week (25 cents), and an old woman who had not a single cent of income at the time of my meeting her, yet would not be said nay when she offered to knit me a pair of socks. There are also folks who are "well to do," though their "well to do" is a standard much different to that of some gentlemen we know, and remind one of the dialogue:

"Do ye ken Jan Leask, o' Abernethy?"

"O ay, I ken Jan, brawly."

"Do ye ken Jan's weel t' do? Jan's gat a coo, an' Jan's gat a soo, an' twixt nathin' an' nothin' Jan's fool worth saxteen pounds!"

There is also a class of people in Shetland who do not need to work any more and who live in fine residences, but they are comparatively few.

It is to be noted, and with some emphasis, that amid all the poverty of this little land the natives are amazingly honest. A modern

The Folks and Their Ways

millionaire could transfer his millions to the summit of Ronas Hill and leave them there unprotected, with no fear as to their safety. There is not a Shetlander (particularly of the peasant class) who would touch a cent belonging to any one else.

Allen Moffatt—"a well-knowd man in th' Islands, yea, knowd fro' Muckle Flugga t' Sumburgh"—was one day in Lerwick and walking Esplanade, when just below Fort Charlotte he saw a yard ahead of him a gentleman's mole-skin purse. Stepping up to it, he took it in his hand and opened it, and lo! it was full of gold. No doubt at that moment there flashed through Allen's mind that the gold would pay all his debts to the merchant; buy his wife, Maggie, a new Sunday dress; fill to the full their larder for the winter; purchase for all the bairns shoes and stockings for Christmas, and assure a visit from the specialist to his daughter Mary, who was visibly dying of some malady they knew not what. Allen must have thought these things, because the Shetland men, though rough and stern in appearance, have

A Sturdy Little Northland

hearts that beat tenderly. They are fathers like other men, and they love their children. But Allen was "a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God and escheweth evil." He was as honest as the best man; he would not even steal a pin. So, being really in no dilemma at all, he simply and firmly said, "No," and laying down the purse just where he had found it, he quietly and happily went on his way.

The Shetlanders are a plain people and of necessity live most frugally. This plainness of diet has a logical consequence—they are generally healthy and strong. The simplicity of their lives speaks eloquently for the great value of a simple life lived largely in the out-of-doors and sustained by a plain, healthy diet. From the standpoint of health there is no place better than Shetland. The summer is never more than warm, and the winter is never dangerously cold. I myself was never in better physical condition than when I lived there. Many were the journeys taken through rainstorms and blizzards; more often than not my shoes were

The Folks and Their Ways

full of water, and time and time again was I drenched to the skin, but not once do I remember taking cold or suffering in the least. Why was this? I am confident that this immunity was the result of the simple life I was then living. Much of the time was spent in pastoral visitation and journeying to preaching appointments, either on foot or cycle, as there are no street-cars or railroad trains in Shetland. My food consisted solely of eggs, fish, potatoes, bran bread, oat-meal scones, and tea. The fish was generally either cured or fresh haddocks, though sometimes I would catch a nice mess of brown trout. Since that time I have lived in Sunny California with its world-famed salubrious climate, its almost perpetual sunshine, and its *high living*, but never for a day have I felt as well. The staple foods of the Shetlander are those enumerated above. Black tea is almost invariably used as a beverage. Alcoholic liquors are there, but seldom abused, except by foreigners, southerners, and those natives who first paid tribute to this Apollyon in foreign ports.

A Sturdy Little Northland

About the beginning of the fifteenth century all the erudition of Spain said that somewhere in the Bahamas was a fountain of perpetual youth. Evidently no one ever found it, but had they transferred the search to the Shetlands they might have met with better success, for the Shetlanders certainly are in possession of the secret of longevity. If it can not be said that they drink from a fountain of perpetual youth, they obviously draw from the wells of *prolonged* youth, for they live to a good old age. One often sees them at the age of eighty and eighty-five digging the "taties" (potatoes). They carry their age wonderfully well, reminding one of the saying: "If you go by my feelin's, I'm about thirty, but if you go by my yeers, I'm sixty-seven. My feelin's an' my age is so far apart that they ain't bin on speekin' terms fer yeers."

The Shetland women are not professional housekeepers, but they are expert *homemakers*. Housekeeping in advanced countries is common, but homemaking seems to be rare. Two young folks lately married were asked by a

The Folks and Their Ways

friend, "When are you to begin housekeeping?" The bride replied, "Never, I trust; we begin homemaking to-morrow." Meager habitations? Ah, yes; but nevertheless real homes. Here is where love reigns and where there is a genuine family fellowship. Many are the lads sailing the seven seas, or the lassies in the southland; and many the immigrants in far-off lands that carry with them immortal memories of home, "like the odor of crushed violets and the sound of Sabbath bells." It was such a memory that inspired a Shetlander in New Zealand to pen the ensuing lines:

"Fair Islands, 'mid the Northern sea,
My own dear Fatherland;
O, how I long to tread again
Thy radiant, peaceful strand!

It can not be; my feet must stray
Far from thy shores forever;
Yet ties that bind my heart to thee
Nought but death can sever.

There is my dear old happy home,
Where first I ope'd my eyes,
Where a mother's loving kiss
Did soothe my infant cries.

A Sturdy Little Northland

I dreamed not then of other lands,
With brighter, sunnier skies;
My Island Home was dear to me,
The fairest in my eyes.

And back to Thule's hills and dells
In fancy's flight I roam;
No other land is half so dear—
My own, my native home.

Thule, my native land, farewell;
I think of thee and sigh;
No change can wipe thee from my heart—
Good-bye, dear land, good-bye!"

In these island homes "mother" is loved and revered. Nothing is too good for her. She is their angel. She is their homemaker. She is queen in her own realm.

"Home is her kingdom, love her dower;
She seeks no other wand of power
To make home sweet, bring heaven near,
To win a smile and wipe a tear,
And do her duty every day
In her own quiet place and way."

Norman Duncan, in the prefatory note of his beautiful story, "Dr. Luke of the Labrador," says: "However bleak the Labrador,

The Folks and Their Ways

however naked and desolate that shore, flowers bloom upon it. However bitter the despoiling sea, however cold and rude and merciless, the gentler virtues flourish in the hearts of the folk.

. . . And the glory of the coast—and the glory of the whole world—is mother-love: which began in the beginning and has continued unchanged to this present time—the conspicuous beauty of the fabric of life: the great constant of the problem.” And it is true that mother-love is also the glory of the Shetland Isles. They know that they can look on one good woman’s face, and they reckon on the love of her. *Her* love, too, is not spent in vain; it is reciprocated. There is nobody in all the world like mother. How often have I seen the tear trickle, when conversing with a mother about “her Wullie” away from home; and many a time has she climbed the hill to scan the horizon to the sou’west.

At the head of a certain voe there is a tiny hamlet with a background of great brown hills, which in June are covered with a purple splen-

A Sturdy Little Northland

dor, and often lurid with the golden rays of a setting sun. It is a charming spot, has a wee cascade and two bonny burns, and is mysteriously unchangeable. No more than fifty inhabitants are there, all of the crofter class.

At the center of this voe-head is a ness of land on which is built the quaintest homestead. Many years ago a ship was wrecked nearby, and among the débris that washed ashore was a case of wine. It is said that the bottles were broken on the rocks of the ness, and thus the jut of land was christened—Wineness. Let us visit this home. We have no sooner stepped out of the boat than we are met by "Carlo," the faithful shepherd of the sheep. He does not know us, so he barks ferociously. As we come near to the house we walk over the most uneven cobblestones. A maiden, sedate and somewhat shy, opens the door to us and bids us come in. Inside, sitting by the fire, is an old lady of some eighty summers, and right cordially she greets us. She is a Shetlander of the old stock. More than fourscore years have gone, but she is still young, and when the

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weather is favorable she can be seen digging the "taties" with the rest of the folk. In speaking of the preceding stormy night, we notice that she calls it "distreen," and many other queer words she uses. She tells us of past hard times, and in her face we read the fortitude with which she fought them. She speaks rapidly, and one has to listen attentively to catch what she says. She knows her Bible from beginning to end, reciting lengthy chapters from an astounding memory, and holding up her hands in holy horror of the wicked. As we are about to leave she takes from the wall a crimson plush heart, and hugging it as a great treasure (for the world could never buy it), she tells us how a son who died away from home "made it wid 'is own 'ands" and sent it to her. It is a sacred emblem of the great love of this home and the passing of one to the Land of Light.

And so in these scraggy straw-thatched huts there dwells a wondrous spirit; the same that molds and sways us from the cradle to the grave—the angel-spirit *Mother*.

IV

The Folks and Their Ways (II)

THE writer of these sketches has been a rambler—a habit which has both its pleasures and its pains. He has also been something of a prospector—not seeking gold or oil, but hearts to win. And just as there is diversity in matters material, so there is diversity in things not material. There are different kinds of hearts, and men are as different as their faces. There are hearts of stubble, and hearts of stone, and hearts of oak, and hearts of gold. This latter quality he has found in the hearts of the Shetlanders. Of them it is true—they have hearts of gold. The gold of the heart is always discerned in the life; in its integrity, its love, its beneficence, its sacrifices. It is bright like refined gold and, like it also, it is mined by contact.

The Folks and Their Ways

The Shetland people are hospitality and benevolence incarnate. They are truly a beneficent folk. They have "the larger heart and the kindlier hand." Find yourself benighted and hungry on the hills; any light from a cottage window tells you that you are welcome there. A square meal, a warm bed, and a hot breakfast they will lovingly bestow on you. Though Shetlanders in general can not set a feast before the stranger, they give ungrudgingly what they do give. The Scriptures say, "God loveth a cheerful giver," and some exegeses tell us that the Greek word translated "cheerful" is of a most vigorous character and might have been translated "hilarious." Few there are in the world who give hilariously, but these Shetlanders are among the few. It is their nature to give like the sun and the flowers. They do not give for self-aggrandizement; they give secretly, and would shame to count it fame. I have known many who gave when they could ill afford it; one old lady who was receiving only a very small pension, thought it not too much to give ten shillings (\$2.50) to the cause

A Sturdy Little Northland

of Foreign Missions—a sum which must have been long in the saving. Such whole-hearted charity comes with a sort of shock in these days. What a comparison to their rugged inhospitable shores, and the sterility of the “Old Rock!” Money and possessions are like fire and water; they make good servants but bad masters.

On the west coast of the isle Mainland, just in from St. Magnus Bay, there is a small village which is noted for its wealth of genius and romance, but more particularly for its beneficence. It is somewhat hidden and remote, and to reach it by water one must take the sound that has the Island of Muckle Roe on its north side and Vementry Isle on the south. The village is situated at the head of the long voe to the south’ard. Its name is Aith. Away to the west on the bleak hillside is a little stone church, called by the folks who live on the crofts round about—“th’ peerie kirk.”¹ So lonely and forsaken does it seem that one wonders how ever it came to be a *Methodist*

¹ “Peerie” is Shetlandic for “little.”

The Folks and Their Ways

church; and what is more mystifying still is that no one knows when it was built. It always was there, they say. Whoever the builder was, 't is strange he should build it there, for it is in the midst of a sea of bogs and ditches, and there is not a road or footpath near it. The stranger thinks it surely must have dropped down out of heaven. Midway between the kirk and the voe shore is a solitary croft which is known as North Gardie. The house is the usual style, stone and straw-thatch, having a wooden porch with a storm-door on either side. The folks whose dwelling this is are the biggest-hearted folks that ever lived. Their home is ever open to the wanderer, and never a hungry soul has yet been turned away. It is the preacher's haven to this day, and has been so as far back as history tells. Besides father and mother there are several sons and daughters. The father—Immanuel Leask—is a quiet and humble man, whose fidelity to the little church would create a romance all its own. Without a cent of recompense he sweeps it; he makes the fires, providing the fuel; and often has he

A Sturdy Little Northland

taken money from his own scanty purse to fill the lamps with oil. Many times was it the writer's privilege to stay the night in Immanuel's home, and never did he stay in a home that was more hospitable. The preacher must have the best, and no pains were spared to make him comfortable. The bedroom was always nice and cosy, with a cheery little peat fire blazing on the hearth, and away down among the blankets there would be a wrapped-up heated brick diffusing its friendly warmth. Then in the morning, as we sat down to a royal breakfast of lamb chops, meal scones, and tea, Immanuel would say, "Noo, sir, eat up an' give th' hoose a guid name." And that is the fine spirit that dominates all their dealings with the stranger.

Aith, it has been said, is noted for its wealth of genius and romance. To tell of the latter—of a "maid o' th' mist" and matrimonial bogs and the trolls that stalk the place at midnight—is not the plan of these writings. It must some day be told in a tale of itself.

In this same town of Aith, in the big house

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by the store, there lives a youthful merchant of some thirty years, honest in business, skilled in the art of angling, an enviable preacher, and something of a poet at times.

"Jeems" is also a humorous man. "Let's go fishing," said he to me one day, and after securing suitable equipment we went. How many fish the writer caught he will leave the reader to surmise. In a letter received one day last year, Jeems says:

"I still try to do a little trout-fishing, but have not done much this year—just been out three times. Do you remember the day we went to Vara Loch together—*that you caught all the trout, until the water fell one inch around the sides of the Loch, so 'great a multitude of fish' was brot to land, both good and bad?*"

"Jeems" is full of wit and irony—an inveterate joker is he. In the fall of 1910 I left America for England intent to marry. Also did I intend a flying visit to my former far-north parishioners, but unfortunately circumstances prevented. My friend Jeems—whom

A Sturdy Little Northland

I am more than proud to call my friend—obviously had kept a lookout and was disappointed (though not a whit more than I) when I failed to arrive. Some time later he wrote me the following letter:

“MY DEAR HAROLD,—

“I was glad to hear again from you. I could n't tell what had gone wrong, as I expected to hear of your arrival in England—but no, nothing but silence, and I began to guess what had become of you.

“Perhaps, thought I, he has fallen overboard and a great whale has swallowed him, and he is steering it in the direction of Thule's far-north isles. So I looked and looked, rising up early and looking for the appearance of a huge monster coming steaming up Aith Voe, with the Parson in question on board. But the three days and three nights came and went, and poor Jeems had to give up hope in that direction.

“And then again he puzzled his mind, and knowing that his friend was a man of many exploits, he began to look in the sky. He got all the telescopes he could muster,

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and employed many eyes—those who could see through nothing and those who could see through anything—and day and night a watch was kept for the appearance of a speck like unto a small bird, as it was expected that an aeroplane would be on its way to Aith with the Rev. Sir on its back. But again came disappointment.

“And so the days wore on, and at last came a letter and a photograph, and behold! everything is explained—our friend has been a journey into the land of matrimony and taken unto himself a wife. May the blessing of Him who maketh rich and addeth no sorrow attend you both! is the earnest desire of

“Yours very affectionately,

“JEEMS.”

On no account must it be left untold that the Shetlanders are a thrifty and industrious race. It has been said that they are shiftless, but that is altogether untrue. These hardy peasants are tireless workers. Hardly has the eastern sky taken on its first tinge of morning than the blue smoke of awakening peat-fires

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begins to ascend. In summer-time they work on the land till near midnight, for it is true that in June and July there is "no night there." And Shetland farms are not farms by decree of nature; much of the land is "bad land," and that which has been cultivated has been literally "won from the wilderness" by dint of hard toil. Dr. Miller in one of his books tells of a clock in the Palace of Napoleon, Paris, which has over its dial the words, "*Non nescit reverti*" (It does not know how to go back). One would think that this inscription was engraved over every Shetland clock, judging by the industry of the folks. Wesley said, "Leisure and I have taken leave of each other." So have they taken leave of all idleness. The women particularly are redeemers of the time. I never saw a Shetland woman waste a minute. Everywhere one hears the humming of the "spinning-wheel," the swishing of the "cards," and the clicking of the needles, for it is by this industry—the manufacture of genuine Shetland hosiery—that most of them make ends meet. It is to be regretted that there is so much im-

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position in respect to this hosiery. Not one thousandth part of the articles marked and sold as "Shetland Floss," "Shetland Wool," and "Shetland Hosiery" has ever seen the other side of the Atlantic Ocean. One reason is that the production of the islands is so small, and while it is true that much of the raw wool is sold to firms in Scotland who card and spin by machinery, it is also true that yarn thus prepared is much inferior to the genuine homespun. To obtain the real article, one must purchase direct either from a merchant in the islands or from the homes of the knitters themselves. Every woman and girl on the thirty islands knits and spins. Ever does one hear the music of the needles. What "Shetland lassies" will do in heaven if there is no knitting, I do not know. If it was said that they are *born* knitting, it would be verily true, in so much that the statement embodies a settled psycho-physiological fact. There is more truth than we realize in the doctrine of prenatal influences. The Shetland child—whose mother was knitting throughout the whole pe-

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riod of its embryonic state—develops a taste and ability for knitting when scarce its little fingers can hold the needles. And these wonderfully busy folks are not nominal knitters, either; they are experts. They are among the few who can really do two things at the same time. Seldom do they look at the knitting they have in hand. They look at you and talk; they read a book; they fetch home the cows—all to the tune of the needles. A familiar sight in the Islands is a “lassie” going o’er the hills—either to fetch provisions or to carry the peats—with outer skirt pinned up, a white handkerchief over her head, a kishie on her back, and knitting all the while.

Shetland wool is unlike any other in the world; it is stronger than the strongest and softer than the softest. The sheep from which the wool is taken are exceedingly hardy creatures, for throughout the long, bitter winter they wander the hills in search of food. Hundreds of lambs perish every year in the snowstorms that come as late as June. There are four varieties of wool: white, gray, dark-

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brown, and moorit; the latter color being a nut-brown. Once a year comes "rooing" time, when the wool is "rooed," or gently pulled, from the sheep. The next part of the process is the "teasing," or pulling loose and slightly moistening with whale-oil. Then it is "carded" and spun. Spinning is an art, and the wheels used by these descendants of the Norsemen are the same that their fathers used a thousand years ago. They call them "spinnies."

Most wonderful of all is the knitting of the famous Shetland shawls and bridal veils. In the year of Queen Victoria's jubilee two fair lassies of the Isle of Unst knitted a shawl and sent it to the queen. It has since been called the "Jubilee Shawl." The skein from which this choice fabric was made was composed of thirty thousand double threads. Shetland shawls are as soft as swan's down and glisten like polished ivory. As with the hosiery, their fair name is to be found on foreign imitations. A genuine Shetland shawl—if properly cared for and cleaned in the right way—is a prize for life, and can be dressed and whitened many

A Sturdy Little Northland

times without injury. It is said that the girls in the Isles of Yell and Unst can make shawls six feet square that will pass through a wedding-ring; and the patterns are not simple by any means, but of the most exquisite designs.

In this day of immigration, when a motley throng is ever coming to progressive countries, the reader naturally asks what sort of immigrant the Shetlander makes. Does he make a good American? Does he make a sturdy Australasian? *He does*, when he is given a fair chance. The percentage of immigrants from Shetland is very, very low, because it is so small a country and the people are so poor. It costs money to immigrate. The only Shetland immigrants known personally to the writer are making good. Several of them hold fine positions, and others are fighting their way up. While in their hearts there is a tender love for the old land, they are at the same time making strong and patriotic citizens. Only recently did the writer meet a Shetland mother and her two little girls, who came out to the West a year and a half ago. The father

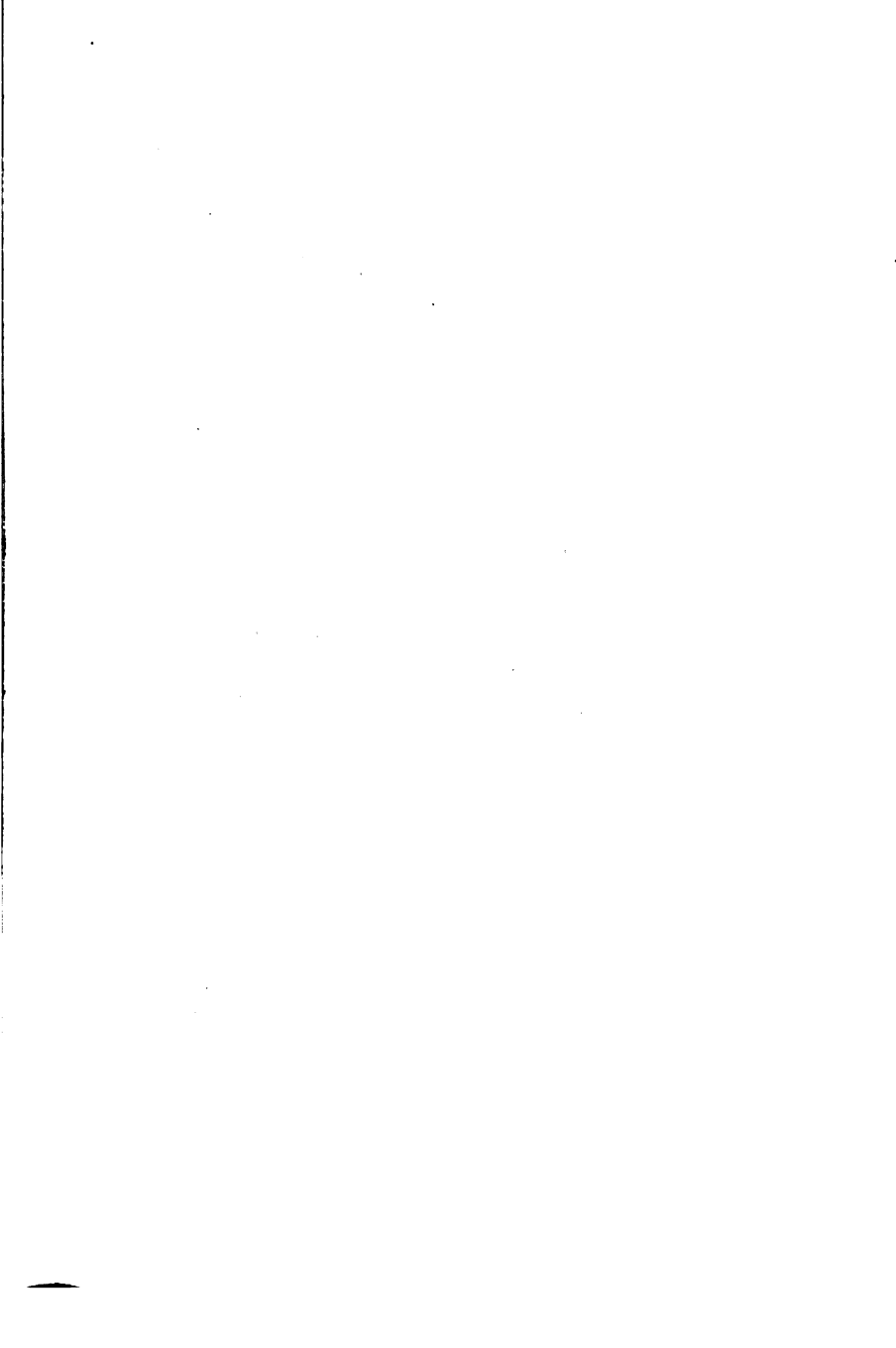


"MAKING GOOD"

A NATIVE SON

A SHIP'S MASTER

A GENTLEMAN LOVED BY ALL



The Folks and Their Ways

had preceded them some two years. This brave little woman left her home and loved ones in the Islands and came out to California—a trip of eight thousand miles. When one takes into account the desolate edge of the world from which she came, the practical ignorance of the folk concerning the great world at large, the fact that she had never seen a tree, much less a street car or railroad train in all her life, the inconceivable bewilderment of such a one on such a journey—through Liverpool, New York, Chicago—her only companions the two baby girls, such an undertaking convinces us that the vikings are not dead yet; their grit and courage are being handed down to us in their posterity. I found her by her husband's side in a charming California town, and together they are making good.

Who shall tell what skill and genius lies dormant in the brains of this far north people? That which has had its opportunity has stood the test of the crucible of life. When Lord Nelson went into the "Battle of Trafalgar," his flagship *Victory* had for its helmsman a

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Shetlander. President McKinley's grandmother was a native of Dunrossness, in the south of the Isle Mainland. Sir Robert Stout, ex-premier of New Zealand, is also a Shetlander; and many, many others have risen to positions of responsibility and honor.

V

A God-Fearing Race

IN Shetland there are Methodist, Presbyterian, Congregational, and Baptist Churches. Being under British rule and nearest to Scotland, the Presbyterian is the State Church. In Lerwick and in the Island of Yell there is, I believe, an Episcopal Church. At the time of the writer's leaving there was no Roman Catholic work whatever.

Methodism in Shetland has a glorious history, for her early preachers were noble and consecrated men. They were ministers in the grandest and fullest sense of the word; not in the pulpit only, but also out of it. Each one was evangelist, pastor, teacher, and servant to the folks whose shepherd he was. Though the venerable Wesley himself never visited the Islands, such men as Drs. Adam Clarke, Mc-

A Sturdy Little Northland

Allum, Knowles, and Revs. Sinclair, Matthewson, Raby, and Dunn itinerated there. And in those days the life of a Methodist preacher was not as comfortable as it is to-day. From the Journals of the Revs. Raby and Dunn I append three short extracts:

“Oct. 29th.—This morning I rode five miles to Tingwall; it rained every step of the way. Many of my hearers came from a considerable distance, and returned through torrents of rain; most of the women without either bonnet, shoe, or stocking. After they were gone I sat by the fire for about half an hour, tired, wet, and hungry, but not knowing where to get a bit of anything to eat . . .”

“Nov. 14th.—Last night I slept with three sheep on the earthy floor of an old barn. There were two holes in the turf roof, about a foot each in circumference, through which the stars were visible. It blew a strong breeze from the S. W., but as I had a thick rug wrapped around me I slept as comfortably as most who lay on softer beds. The hymn which begins, ‘How do Thy mercies close me round?’ was particularly sweet.”

A God-Fearing Race

"Nov. 24th.—This morning I felt very unwell; whether it was from eating small sillocks, drinking mossy water, a change of climate, or excessive exertion, I know not. At ten o'clock I lay down again on the bed, but at twelve, the time at which I was appointed to preach, the friends came to me saying that people were coming from every direction to hear me, and that several had arrived from places nine or ten miles off; so I got up and went to the church (Sandness), but found it difficult to get in, it was so crowded. . . . I have preached thirty sermons in the last fourteen days."

The missionary in the Shetland of to-day may live any kind of life he wishes. He may kill himself with arduous toil or he may bring about the same end by laziness. If he is any sort of preacher at all, he will get fair congregations; but should he assume the parson and the better-bred—in other words, should he not make himself one with the common folk—he will not be worth a snap of the fingers at his job. On the other hand, if he will love them as his own soul, and ever seek to help them, there is not a thing that they will not

A Sturdy Little Northland

do for him. He will be everything to them, and he will surely accomplish his Master's business. But here as in all other lands the Christianity that takes hold must be one of practice. It is the "cup of cold water," the coin left under the plate, the soothing or extracting of an aching tooth, the carrying of a kishie¹ for the sick or the aged, and the Christmas gift to the bairns *that tell most*. They can appreciate a sermon—ay, that they can—and go home carrying "the points"—*but these concrete acts stick longest*.

Shetland in many respects is like Labrador. While it is a really healthy country, there is, nevertheless, sickness to be found there, though nowhere near so much as in Labrador. But what sickness there is seems to be bred of the same cause; just the same story of sad conditions. Poverty, some uncleanness, and lack of modern sanitation and ventilation have, as they invariably do, invited disease. There are many cases of rheumatism, and occasionally one hears the hard cough and sees the flushed

¹Native basket carried on the back.

A God-Fearing Race

and hollow cheek which unmistakably tell that the Great White Plague is there. There is need for medical aid, and to meet it each parish has a medical practitioner; but the greater need is the teaching of the principle that "prevention is better than cure." The missionary, therefore, must not only preach a spiritual salvation from sin, but a physical one from disease. He must teach not only righteousness, but hygiene. For instance, there is the care of the teeth. As a result of ignorance and neglect, dental caries set in early, and when the bitter wind comes down from the Arctic it soon finds the decaying cavity, and pain ensues. There is but one dental surgeon to twenty-nine thousand people. Should the writer of these sketches in the wise providence of God be permitted to return to this land (and it is a cherished desire within his heart that he shall), it is his plan to practice as a missionary of the Cross and a dental surgeon combined. Of necessity it would need be purely missionary work, as the natives have little or no money to pay out for dental service.

A Sturdy Little Northland

The Shetland missionary must be willing to clean and paint his own church, if need be, to ring the bell, and play the organ, and preach, and do all himself. He may have to pull a heavy boat across rough sounds to his appointments, and find his hands bleeding with the chafing of the oars. Should he be a musician, he will find it exceedingly helpful; should he know anything of medicine, his pills and lotions and dressings will bless. But there is little remuneration; it must be for the love of God. Nevertheless it is great good fortune to have the privilege of holding up the banner here.

Gliding into Gonfirth Voe one Monday morning was a smack of a peculiar kind. She hailed from Orkney, and this was not her first visit; she had skirted the Shetland coast for years. Her name is forgotten, but she is familiarly known as "The Floating Shop." Once a month her skipper brings a goodly cargo of provisions and trades them for hosiery, eggs, and the like. Her crew willingly transport intending traders in their small punt to the

A God-Fearing Race

"Shop," and a jolly set of men they are. The morning of which this is written had been a time of business. Among those who had done "their bit" was an old maiden lady of some eighty summers, familiarly known as "Jemima." A kishie, containing "a scar o' this an' a peerie corn o' that," was landed along with her on the shingly beach. Its destination was a scraggy old hut by the side of a burn, about a quarter of a mile up the hill. How the kishie was to be transferred from the shore to the house was the all-absorbing question to Jemima. She could not carry it, if it never got there—that was sure. Waiting at the landing for his turn to go shopping was the chronicler of this incident, and while waiting, he himself transferred the kishie to the home. It was nothing at all—just what any man would have done—but to this day Jemima has not ceased to sing her praises of the "Peerie Munister," as she lovingly calls him. And when the eastern breezes blow and her letter comes, these words are written:

A Sturdy Little Northland

"DEAR REV. GRIMSHA:

"I am very hapy to av the upertunity of writin to you, but I am sory you are gone so far away. so very likly you will never cary my kusy agen mor I was hoping you to comeback to Shetland agen. Johanna is sick not like to get beter but I most be content what ever the Lord is plassd to lay on. With love to you I must be don."

Was it not worth while? Jemima's letter, illiterate though it be, has caused the joy-bells of my heart to ring again and again, and I have learned that the path of humble service is the Master's highway of joy. This is the sort of preaching these folks need most, and the sort they appreciate. "Unwritten sermons," as Dr. Grenfell calls them. Jesus said, "He who will be your minister, let him be servant of all." It is very true "that whatever work one volunteers to make his own, he must look upon as his ministry to the race."

The Shetlanders, as a result of their home training and nature's environment, are inclined

A God-Fearing Race

toward things that are good. Morally, they reach a high standard. In general, they are truly a God-fearing race; and it is to the sweet simplicity of the home-life and the kindly influences of the sea and the hills that they owe this heritage. During my sojourn there I saw only three men under the influence of the drink, two of whom had learned the habit in foreign ports; and only twice did I hear any one make use of profanity, and then it was just the talking of the whisky demon within.

VI

Kindly Hearts o' Gonfirth

SOMEBODY has said that when God made the Sahara, He made it in His anger, and then forgot it. The same unkindly thing has been said about Iceland. One does not experience much difficulty in thinking a similar thought concerning old Gonfirth, for of all the forgotten places in the world it is the spot of all spots desolate and forbidding. Here is dire lonesomeness, with strange immutability—"as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be"—but it is notable because of the goodness of the folks who live there. Gonfirth was the center of the writer's ecclesiastical field. It was here that he lived the life of a lonely bachelor, carrying his own peats, fetching his water from the wells round about, cleaning and



A SHETLAND HOME



Kindly Hearts o' Gonfirth

painting the little church, and desperately striving to acquire the art of cooking. But though a training-ground in the culinary line, it was also a school in which were taught the secrets of happiness and soul conquest. It was here at lonely Gonfirth that the missionary of the wild learned the sweetness of life and the joy of a glad love-service; it was here that he learned to lean on God and to be integral in respect to his life's purpose. Taking long, wearying journeys on foot, dressed in sea-boots and oilskins, tramping miles over boggy and treacherous moors, and crossing sounds and voes till the hands bled with the chafing of the oars—only to find congregations (in winter) of sometimes half a dozen—meant to him the sure development of the man physically, psychologically, and spiritually.

The following characters are folks well known in Gonfirth and the district round about. They are still there, living out their simple life of contentment among the hills and on that rugged shore.

A Sturdy Little Northland

CHRISTIAN NEILSON.

Climb the hill to the west, then take a course due south or a little to the southwest, over the undulating heather-clad moor. You will find it hard traveling, for where it is not boggy you will have to jump deep peat-pits, out of which the peats for many years have been cut. If you see a patch of green, greener and apparently firmer than all the rest, be sure and do not step on it—give it a wide berth—it is a floating bog. Some two miles across this waste, built on the edge of a cliff, you will come to a solitary “croft.” It is a good place to stay for a refreshing drink of tea, and if you are known to be genuine you will receive a welcome that you can never forget. It is the home of Christian Neilson, a God-fearing son of the soil. He is now gray and stoops a little, but his eyes are as clear and as honest as any man’s. Everybody loves Christie, and he is looked up to by all, for, true to his name, he is an exemplary Christian man. He will take you by the hand, and it will be some time before your fingers will regain their work-

Kindly Hearts o' Gonfirth

bility; then he will say, "God bless yo—come yo ben Mester." And in that cozy little room (and your tramp across the moor will have given you a Shetland appetite) they will set before you the cleanest and most wholesome meal in all the world. Christie Nee'son—as the folks call him—when younger, spent much of his time in Greenland as a whaler, but for many years now has stayed at home and superintended the working of the "croft." His wife, a saintly woman, is an invalid—a victim to chronic rheumatism. There are also in the home two married daughters, a son, and a happy group of children.

It is the Sabbath and near time for evening service. The writer, as missionary, has just rung the last bell. The night is very dark and the rain is beginning to drizzle and the wind to howl. As yet, no one has come, and the likelihood of a congregation seems remote; so, after waiting a while, before turning out the lights, he goes to the outer corner of the enclosure to take a last lookout for any one who

A Sturdy Little Northland

may be coming. No, there is no one. Wait! What is that? Surely, there is a light! Over on the ridge of the hill to the west is the tiny light of a hurricane lamp, swinging; now up on a knoll, now down in a hollow out of sight. Who can it be? Whoever can it be on such a night? Nearer and nearer comes the light till it is within the churchyard gate. Carrying the lantern is a man of medium height, clad in oilskins, sea-boots, and sou'wester. A moment later, and the flickering light of the porch shines on the stranger's weatherbeaten face. Who is it? It is Christian Neilson.

Christie and the missionary were the only two in the congregation that night, and it was not the first time they had worshiped alone together. The service indeed was short, but peculiarly fitting. First they sang a part of the hymn that begins:

“Lead, kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom
Lead Thou me on;
The night is dark, and I am far from home;
Lead Thou me on.”

Kindly Hearts o' Gonfirth

Then followed a reading of Psalm Twenty-seven, after which they prayed, and closed with the stanza :

“So long Thy power hath blessed me; sure it still
Will lead me on
O'er moor and fen, o'er crag and torrent, till
The night is gone.”

Christian Neilson was and is to-day a man ever to be relied upon. He is a saint at Gonfirth, and one of God's gentlemen.

THE DUNCANS O' GROBSNESS.

Following the shore around the voe-head, and then along to the north for about a hundred yards, one comes to an old footpath worn hard and smooth by the constant use of the children coming and returning from school. At this point it is a series of steps up, then along by the fence for about thirty yards, where it turns in at a “grind,”¹ and then up the hillside, becoming narrower and narrower, till it is just a slippery sheep-track—nothing more. Follow it for some little distance and

¹A gate.

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you will come to a picturesque hamlet nestling in a sheltered hollow. This is Grobsness, and here reside six or seven families. It is about the folks who live in the whitewashed house in the center of the place that I want to tell.

The Duncan home is a model home, noted for its cleanliness and thrift. The father, Thomas Duncan, has passed beyond the veil; but the mother, though fast aging, still lives. She is a good woman and an ideal mother, and her great faith in God and providence are remarkable, while everything and everybody share in her love. She is the picture of neatness and always is she busy treading her big Norwegian spinning-wheel. There are two daughters: Mary and Williamina; and three sons: Oliver, George, and Nicholas. And what sons they are! reminding one of "Jack and the Beanstalk," or else the text, "There were giants in the earth in those days." Just what "altitude" they reach I do not know, but they are exceedingly tall. At a distance it would be difficult to tell one from the other, but near at hand they are easily distinguish-

Kindly Hearts o' Gonfirth

able. Oliver is clean-shaven about the chin, though he grows a mustache; George—or “Geordie,” as he is familiarly called—boasts a heavy red-brown beard (his name should have been Rufus); while Nicholas, a man of some ability and a deep-sea man in times gone by, has hair and beard jet black. Oliver is a carpenter and, like his brother George, who is a farmer, combines the occupation with the fishing. Nicholas keeps a store by the water's edge and sells bread, tea, biscuits, and all manner of things. But in addition to this he has another source of remuneration. One day, when visiting him, he said to me, “Before you go, Mr. Grimshaw, I want to show you my whelk farm.” “*Whelk* farm?” thought I. I had heard of cow farms and poultry farms, and even ostrich farms; but *whelk* farm! I suppose my face betrayed my puzzled brain, and I remember experiencing some difficulty in keeping back my laughter. But, following the inevitable “scar o' tea,” I went down with him to a rocky part of the fore-shore, where (in some way still mysterious to me), he had suc-

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ceeded in getting a great colony of whelks,¹ or periwinkles, as they are sometimes called. There they were in thousands clinging to the rocks.

“And what do you do with them, Nicholas?” I asked. “Oh,” he replied, “when they gets big enough I puts 'em in bags an' sends 'em t' London market.”

On snowy days, when scarce a handful would get to church, I could invariably count on Nicholas. His great, tall figure could be seen trudging along the old path, and always did he seem so glad to come. And his Christianity was not merely one for convenience: it was a religion that meant sacrifice to him. Every six months he sent what money he could spare to Dr. Barnardo's Home, in London, and the little orphans there correspond with him; and just how Nicholas loves those children and their letters it is impossible for pen to tell.

He is a most remarkable man for knowledge of the world and for goodness. The half-hour chats I used to get with him were always so

¹A species of shell fish.

Kindly Hearts o' Gonfirth

encouraging, for Nicholas is not pessimistic: he is ever a cheerful optimist.

JEMIMA AND JOHANNA.

Gonfirth is truly an antiquated place, for it has no respectable foot-paths, no roads, no gutters, no street lamps, no piers, no anything that modern civilization has invented. Instead of foot-paths and roads there are sheep-tracks; instead of public lamps there are the tiny lights of cottage windows; and instead of piers one sees a line of stepping-stones, which the folk who live in closest proximity proudly call "our pier." Of course, there are no regularly-constructed boat-slips, by which to transfer heavy boats to the water's edge; only a series of whale-ribs laid crosswise, which, being of a slippery nature, cause the keel to slide rather than drag.

Leaving the church by way of the east, we strike across the hill till we come to a rickety old "grind," at the other side of which, some few yards ahead, there is a rushing burn. In Gonfirth there are two burns, each flowing

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from south to north, one on the east side of the village and one on the west; but it is the east side one that is the important one, because it is biggest and has a waterfall, and on its banks are the dwellings of the folk.

We cross this burn and follow its course till within some fifty yards of the waterfall; then, turning to the right, we climb a low fence and jump from boulder to boulder, thereby again reaching the other side of the burn. We then climb a cobbly apology for a road, and, passing through another "grind," arrive at a miserable little cottage half sunken in the ground. It is a quaint old shack, almost pre-historic in design and fittings. No matter how diminutive you may be, you will have to stoop considerably to get in at the door, and from the door to the little peat-fire it is an ascent of one in six. In the poor illumination one can discern a bed made of unplanned timber, with coverlets of cheap blankets and a sheepskin or two. There are also a couple of whitewood chairs and a three-legged stool, now black with age and grime. Hanging from the ceiling (which

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is black with peat-smoke) can be seen bunches of dried fish—the winter's supply; and in the corner by the window is an old cask in which are kept tea, oatmeal, and bread. The walls are not papered, not even lime-washed, and the floor is earthen and as uneven as the very sea.

Here there dwelt two maiden ladies, both full eighty years of age and victims of chronic rheumatism. There also abode here a steel-gray cat with big yellow eyes, and six white mice, which were a constant terror to the "lassies" of the place when occasionally they dropped in to "sit a start" with the old maids. (In the Islands there is said to be six times as many women as men, and in going in and out among the natives one does meet with quite a number of old maids, who are living either alone or with a sister or friend in little miserable huts sometimes not more than eighteen feet square.)

The names of these elderly bodies (we will say) were Jemima and Johanna, and the cat's name was Jimmy. The mice, too, were all

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christened, but their names are now long since forgotten. Jemima was eldest and was managing directress of household affairs. She was slightly taller than Johanna, and her hair was gray. She was almost a cripple and was exceedingly short-sighted, and always made use of a crutch. Johanna was the more peculiar in appearance, and she seemed to be somewhat subordinate to the dictates of her sister, though 't is true that they loved each other more than tongue can tell. Johanna's hair was black, and her skin was very brown. She was a well-known figure at old Gonfirth, and every morning between the hours of nine and ten could she be seen trudging down the hill below the loch with a great kishie of peats on her back. And then, everybody for miles round "kenned" Johanna, because at "rooing" time (the time when the wool is taken from the sheep) she would pay them all a visit, and each, as their custom was, would give her a little of their wool.

These two lived together in the shack just by the burn, and while it is true that they were

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woefully poor, it is also true that they were no exception to that wondrous characteristic of their fellow islanders—they had hearts of gold. Often at the end of a long, hard journey from North Roe (a trip of thirty miles through high winds and pouring rain or snow, and that on foot and cycle, the latter being of little use in such weather) did the writer step into Jemima's antiquated home for the "cup o' tea and the peerie scone" that he knew were awaiting him. And what tea it was! The like of it is never seen in progressive lands. It was "black" tea—truly as black as "Steven's Ink." And it was strong—yea, indeed—for, if the plain truth must be told, it was seasoned with cloves. But no matter how black, no matter how strong—to the missionary, wet to the skin and cold to the bone, and with an appetite like the grumbling of a volcano, it was verily good. And tired as he was, he would "sit a start" and against his will would fall asleep. Just what movements were made during those "forty winks" are unknown to him, but he would wake up with a Shetland "hap" (shawl) about

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his shoulders. Ah, yes! Jemima and Johanna were kind and good.

It is Sunday evening, and already the sun is spilling his golden wine among the clouds. The sea has been a mirror to-day, and just now the tide is returning; amid the stillness there is heard the lullaby of the shingle and the hoarse cry of the gulls. It is an evening superb, but it is an evening of shadows. There is, too, a sad moaning of the sea, and the wavelets are saying something. Near, quite near, is a strange boatman, and he is waiting, waiting. And in the shack beyond the grind, the shack that is ever so old, there is an atmosphere of expectancy mingled with watching. Johanna Tait lies a-dying.

Inside, sitting by the bed, is Jemima, and also there is a group of friends. They have delayed to light the lamp because the glory of the setting sun shines in at the window. It is an earthly glory, symbolical of a heavenly one.

"Mima," says Johanna, "do ye ken the bonny light shinin' in on us?"

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"I do," replies the sister; "t' is the setting o' th' sun, ye ken."

"Nay, 't is not," says the waiting soul; "'t is reflection o' the' golden streets o' 'eaven."

Jemima's tears begin anew to flow.

A paroxysm of coughing seizes the poor frame on the bed, and it is some time before she can speak again. Soon, however, she says:

"Mima, is de sittin' by me bed?"

"Aye, Joan," assures the sister.

"Can ye no 'ear th' lovely angils singin' round th' throne? 'T is sure pratty music, Mima."

"Seel!" she cries, "the gates o' pearl is openin' an' a bonny angil is beckonin' me come."

By this time the fountain of the deep was broken up in the hearts of the watchers, and the last of the sun was peeping o'er the hills to the west. Still, far into the night did Johanna Tait linger, and still, all unseen, did the boatman wait.

It was just after midnight when the end

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came. She did not speak again till a moment before her death, when she whispered:

"He 's comin'. He 's comin' now for Joan."

I, being one of the watchers, was tired and sleepy, and as I dozed I dreamed that the strange boatman had gone; and waking immediately, I found that Johanna had just died.

And methinks that when they reached the other shore they were met by the shining ones, and Johanna Tait, the poor, hard-working but golden-hearted Shetlander—amazed beyond conception by the sight of angels and the grandeur of the city—was led through the heavenly streets to the throne of her Redeemer, there to see His face and be glad.

VII

Barbara

IT was on the eleventh of January that the Methodist Mission of Junis Voe held a celebration. It was partly a banquet of farewell to their missionary, who was leaving the Islands for Canada, and in part it was intended to commemorate the advent of the new year, for, following the old Norse customs, Christmas Day in Shetland comes on the fifth of January and New Year's Day on the twelfth of January.

The summer previous had been a miserable one, and so far the winter had been exceptionally severe. In fact, from late in October to the day of which I write there had been nothing but storms and hurricanes of wind and fog, of snow and ice, of thunder and rain. So

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tempestuous had December been that the folks had literally to tie down the haystacks with rope, and to save the roofs of their dwellings they had weighted them down with great stones. The night before the banquet had been the worst that even the oldest inhabitant could remember. What with buffeting winds and terrific peals of thunder and blue blinding flashes of lightning, it had been terrifying. The waves had run mountain-high, higher than ever they had run before; but there had been no snow, though torrents of rain. Old Tommy Sinclair and Magnus Anderson were caught on their way from Brae, and had been compelled to seek shelter under Johnny Hall's "six in hand," which for the winter Johnny had turned over and weighted down with rocks and pieces of iron and the like. Amos Smith's store had been flooded, it being much too near the shore for such a gale, and no end of trawlers and smacks had broken from their moorings, while in Orkney a cloud had burst and rain had been incessant. But as Magnus said (and he was the prophet of the neighborhood), "The ways

Barbara

o' Providence was pas' findin' out," for about ten o'clock in the morning the clouds blew away, and during the whole of the day not a drop of rain fell or any disagreeable wind blew. "But," said Magnus, "it was only like the good Lard to plant 'iz footsteps on the storm, kuz 'e auredy kenned about their celeration, an 'e needed no to be reminded consarning thad." It was certainly phenomenal, for there could never be two days more unlike than the day before the banquet and that last day in the old year.

All day long there had been a busy time at the little church. The missionary labored with the decorations; also tuning the little organ and fixing a new chain to the old bell. Those of the folks who had promised bread, flour-cakes, oat-meal scones, etc., busied themselves with baking, while the lads of the place fetched provisions from the store. At about three o'clock the sun went down, for on our coast the winter-nights are long. At five the first bell rang. There was to be one at five, one at six, and one at seven. In a porch window

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of the church the missionary's lamp burned brightly, for it had been a custom of his always to have a light shining out on the voe. Junis Voe has no street lamps—indeed, there are no streets to light. The lamp burning in the church window had somehow made things less lonesome for the folks, so they said. The evening was fine and bright, and the *Aurora Borealis* flashed and shot across the heavens, as though the elements too were conspiring to make us glad. The northern lights in the Islands are called the "Merry Dancers," and, say some of the old folks, "'t is th' spirits o' th' dead at play." The second bell rang, and soon was heard the clanging of the third. Long before the appointed time the more energetic membership had gathered. There were the Housten girls from the West Side, and Christina and Helga Christiansen from the "Moon;" the "Moon" being a little house far away on the summit of a hill, some short distance from the Isle Linga. There were also Herbert Manson and Theodore, his brother. Herbert was bookkeeper at Amos Smith's

Barbara

store and had "some larnin'," which undoubtedly had secured for him that position. And, strange to say, though a British subject, he had extremely democratic views, and held with gifted Bobby Burns that "a man's a man for a' that."

Herb's brother Theodore was a youth of peculiar appearance and more peculiar gait. He, too, had "some larnin'," but he had specialized in the "star line," being (in his way) something of an astronomer.

These, with many others, made up the crowd on this particular New Year's Eve.

But one was there who was a stranger. He was unlike a native of our Islands in more senses than one. His dress was smart and of tourish fashion. Though we never learned in what capacity he visited us, in every outward appearance he seemed to be a gentleman. Always did he appear to be interested in our ways, though a certain sly look in his eyes some way led us to distrust him. While in our midst he paid much attention to one of our "lassies" named Barbara Hughes.

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Barbara was the daughter of old Dannie Hughes, who for years had followed the calling of a whaler up in Davis Straits. It was just twelve months previous to her meeting the "stranger" that Barbara had returned from a visit to relatives in Edinburgh. Full of the new life of the Scottish metropolis, she naturally fancied the admiration and attention of a smartly-dressed gentleman—many of whom she had seen and met in Edinburgh—to a plain, illiterate fisher-lad of her native land. Then, too, Barbara was no ordinary girl. Though born and raised on a humble croft, she was admired and loved by every one. Her face had a noble cast, and her beautiful black tresses were such as many a duchess would have been glad to own. Her eyes like sapphires sparkled with the vigor of early and beautiful womanhood. Never did she appear with hair unkempt or slattern's dress; always she was neat and clean.

"Like a jewel were her eyes,
Like red coral were her lips."—

Barbara

I must not let my pen run away with me in describing Barbara, though it would be an easy thing. When Prince Ferdinand was at labor and there passed by Miranda, her beauty was so enchanting that, to him, "spring seemed a lesser loveliness." Exclaimed the prince, "O you wonder! whether you be maid or no;" and Miranda, who was wishing for a lover, replied, "No wonder, sir, but certainly a maid." And somehow I think that when Tudor wrote that "here one occasionally sees among the women-kind faces of the most beautifully-refined cast" he must have caught a glimpse of Barbara. Poor Barbara! Little did she know the heartbreak and calamity that her new-found "stranger lover" was to bring to her.

The evening's entertainment had begun and had been organized into three sections. First there was to be a musical hour, then a series of games, and finally the welcome of the New Year out in the church grounds. It was not a classic musical by any means, but it was the best "scratched up affair" anywhere within twenty miles of the voe. First of all a hymn

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was sung; then prayer; then another hymn, followed by a humorous reading by Thora Hous-ten. Then the Moffatt boys entertained the company with their phonograph, and Theodore Manson told his usual "story of the stars." The missionary played an organ solo, followed by more items; and then supper was served, after which the room was cleared, and wholeheartedly began the games, which with great hilarity proceeded till near midnight. "Bokie Blind," "Hunt the Slipper," and a dozen other mazes kept all in a state of great excitement. At just one minute to twelve all trooped out into the open air, and at twelve just a rifle-shot, a many-colored rocket, and the ringing of the bell announced that another year had gone forever, and that a new one with its opportunities and responsibilities had come. The scene that followed is almost indescribable. Never in all his life did the writer see such hearty shaking of hands and heads, and such excited wishing of "A Happy New Year." The missionary for the last time was affectionately bid good-bye and God speed, and all went home in

Barbara

groups, singing songs known only in that land. It had been a joyous time, indeed.

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Early in the fall of that same year—one dark, rainy midnight—there could have been seen staggering along the road which leads from Junis Voe to the Parish of Wrath a decrepit old man with a lighted lantern in his hand. It was old Dannie Hughes. He was evidently in great trouble, for he was crying, and crying aloud. From one side to the other he staggered, and ten times he fell on the stony road. His wails were the wails of a breaking heart. Sometimes his grief seemed unbearable, and he cried, “O my God, my bonnie Barbe; my bonnie Barbe; my God, my God!”

The resident physician of the Parish of Wrath at this time was Dr. Reginald Simpson, a man with a big heart and of repute for his skill. He had of late, for health reasons, relinquished a remunerative practice in one of the cotton towns of England, and had wisely sought the fresh air and invigoration of the Shetlands. With sympathetic comprehension

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of old Dannie's appeal, he quickly hitched up his "gig" and drove in all haste to Junis Voe, taking the old Shetlander with him. Half an hour later they found poor Barbara in anguish—a travail which should not have been hers. Barbara lived, but the golden light of the new day that stole in at the bedroom window fell upon a tiny form that was still.

It was just the same old story of a trusting, loving girl and a false lover; just a repetition of what is happening every day the world over. But with us it is more tragic, for the girls of our Islands, unlike the city girls, have no change to which they can fly when their hearts are broken and their lives made desolate. They must continue to live in changeless monotony, in remorse with no recompense. And Shetland lassies have hearts true to the core; when their love is wounded, that love dies hard, if it die at all. Be it said to the glory of the men of the coast that heart-breaking is never laid at their doors; invariably it is an alien that strikes the blow. During the past months Barbara, with bleeding heart and fearful soul, had

Barbara

hoped against hope for the return of her lover. "Perhaps he would remember the promises he had made her and the debt he surely owed her," she thought. But he did not come, and never a word, no, never a word did the postman bring. Poor old Dannie and his faithful wife, her mother, grieved sorely, for beautiful Barbe was their only "bairn," the rightful pride of their hearts.

After long months Barbara regained her physical health, but there was something strangely wrong. It would have been easier for Dannie and his wife to have cared for their daughter had she been a bedfast invalid, for Barbara's affliction caused her to stray from home. In the night-time she would rise and wander out toward the sea. Always would she turn to the west and, reaching the edge of the precipitous cliffs, there would stand for hours with her right hand upon her heart. Again and again in the dead of night was she seen on those bleak headlands, the wind blowing through her beautiful black hair, and her robe quickly whitening with the snow. For two years and

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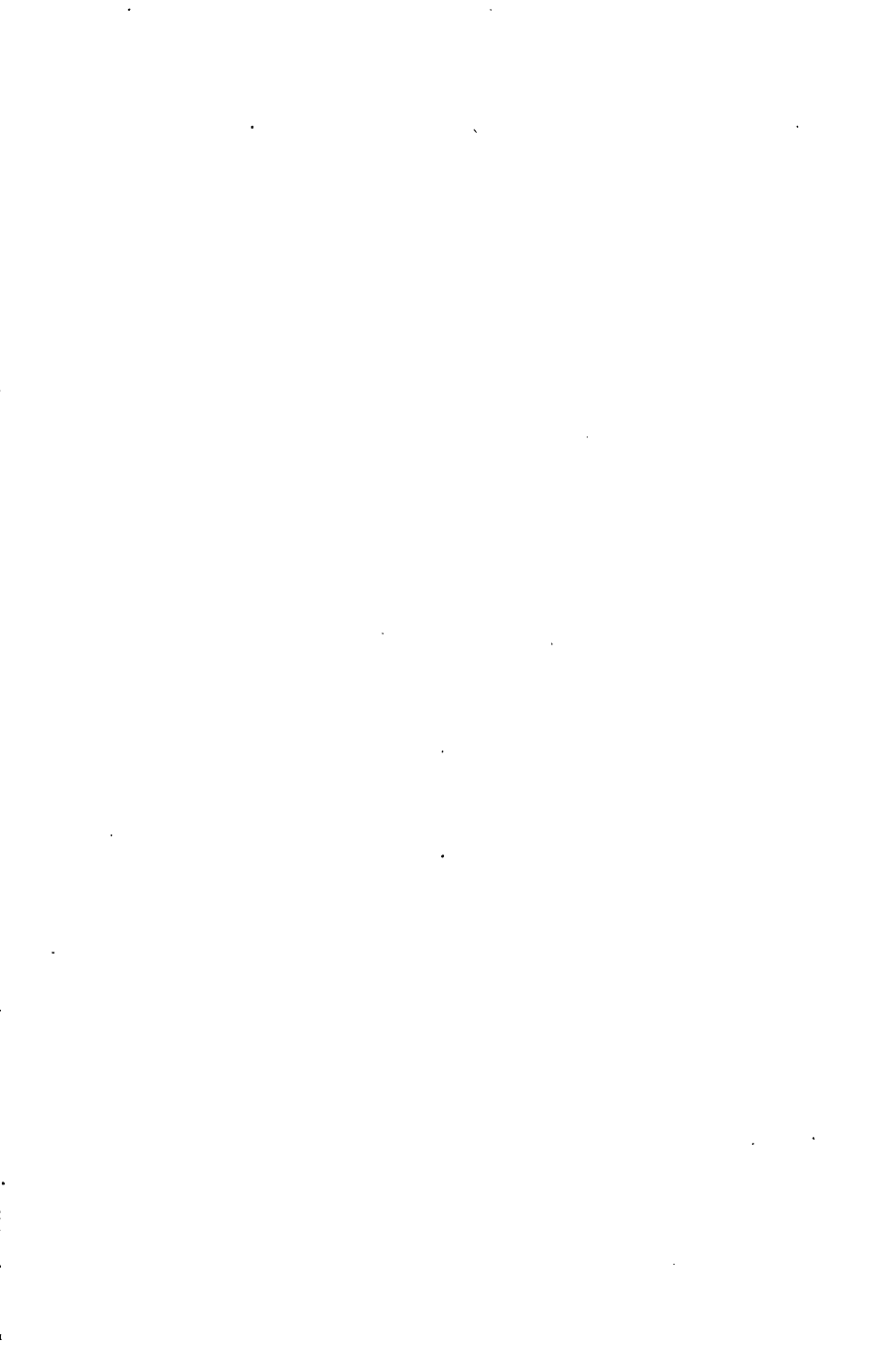
a third did Barbara stray thus; but in one of her rambles on a cold December night she contracted pneumonia, and in three days died in her mother's arms. In the little churchyard of the village of Junis Voe she is buried. It was near evening when twenty-nine souls gathered round the open grave, and never was there a more impressive funeral. The land was white with snow, the eastern sky was blue, and the west was lurid with a blood-red sun. At the head of that heather-clad resting-place, on a rude boulder of gray stone, are the words:

“BARBARA HUGHES

AGED 26 YEARS.

*Until the day break and the
shadows flee away.”*

Methinks that when the Great White Throne is set, Barbara will come to her own and the “stranger” to his; for Christ has said, “In My Father's house are many mansions; I go to prepare a place for you.” And “God is not mocked; whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.”





WILDLY GRAND IN ALL ITS ADORABLE RAGE

VIII

The Peril of the Sea

"I dream of the sea, I dream of the sea.
Its swishing waves make music for me,
Its pulsing waters beat in my blood,
My heart knows the movement of neap-tide and flood.
Its mist-veiled horizons challenge me
To believe in God and eternity."

FOR the worship of the sea there surely is no better land in all the world than Thule. Here it is seen in its sublimest splendor, in all the marvelous phases of its moods. At times it is mirror-like and clear, and one instinctively thinks of the oars; and at times it is angry and wildly grand in all its adorable rage. The far-north point of Mainland is known by the name of Fetta-land. It is a precipitous headland some six hundred feet high. In a word, it is a battlefield—the scene of a million wars twixt

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rock and wave. For the lover of the sea it is undoubtedly an especial vantage ground. With a stiff arctic breeze sweeping down from the north, and a full tide, the drama played presents a magnificent spectacle. Great billows with caps like whitest snow hurl themselves against the impregnable iron face, and then shoot heavenward with silvery breath as of a steaming geyser. Such a sight surpasses description; it is altogether too wonderful to portray by pen. Even the camera would be far inadequate. To watch this ocean contest only increases its wondrousness, and one becomes enchanted as before Niagara. First, the beholder is astounded, then he raves over the scene; and if he is poetical, or has the rich sense of wonder, or, better still, if in his heart is that something which would make a great musician, the eyes become wet and the tears begin to trickle, and the soul weeps out its adoration:

“O the sea, the sea, the wondrous sea!”

The lure of the wild is not imaginary: it is real. Those few things of nature which have

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gone unspoiled by civilization seem to have always exerted a magnetic influence over man. They call him; they draw him; they lure him from home and loved ones, oftentimes for a long period, and that not all a period of pleasure, but also of privation and sufferings. The wildness of the virgin forest and the prairie, the lonesome desolation of the sphinx-like Northlands, the bleak and sandy wastes of brushy desert, and the mad, tumultuous grandeur of the great deep woo and call and tug at the heart of many, and back to the wild they go, again and again and again.

But the sea is not only glorious and grand, it is threatening and full of disaster. Like most things that lure us, it also imperils. There is a *glory* of the sea; there is also a *peril* of the sea. And it is about this latter thing that the Shetland people know so much.

The Island of Yell is second in size of all the islands of the Shetland archipelago, and it is said to be the most sterile of all the group. The interior of this isle is at once gloomy and

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forbidding, for, save a few green patches, it is one monotony of peat-bogs and brown heather. The coast in many places is exceedingly rocky and precipitous, and it bears a reputation of disaster second to none. Wind-lashed and scoured by the storms of centuries, it presents a face that is decidedly inhospitable and perilous. A peculiarity of the Island is that there are granite columns along different parts of the shore which are said to have been erected by the vikings as memorials of thanksgiving for preservation from shipwreck.

It was to the folks on the northwest coast of this isle, on July 20, 1881, that there came the greatest catastrophe that has ever befallen the Shetland people. To this day it is called "The Great Gale o' Yell Sound." The morning of the day on which this terrific squall came had been perfect. The sun had shone out of a clear blue sky, not so much as a tiny cloud being visible. The early morn indeed was a morn of promise, and the men of the coast were quick to take advantage, for hardly had the sun begun to rub his eyes than they were off to the

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"haaf," or deep fishing-grounds. But sunshine in Shetland is often delusive; one hour may be perfect summer, the next a playtime for the Storm King. Those who have lived there know full well to keep their oilskins near at hand. The sunshine of this woeful day seemed just a lure of the fates, for soon after midday the sky clouded, the wind rose, the sea grew boisterous, the gale howled and shrieked, and they who had sailed the placid sea of the early morn returned no more. There is little left on record concerning the catastrophe except the extent of the death-toll. Of the sixty-three brave Shetland men who with glad hearts and songs on their lips had gone to sea that early morning *not one* returned to tell the grim tale. Almost every family on the coast lost its breadwinner. The story of the shipwreck and the desolate wives and children sped along electric wires and was printed in the newspapers of the morrow. And be it penned down in history to the glory of old "Britain" that the soul of the kingdom was stirred to its depths, and men and women—aye, men who till then were rated

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soulless—gave unstintingly of their wealth, and a fund of seventeen thousand pounds was raised.

The older folks tell the story of a girl who at one time lived alone with her father on a certain island. She was beautiful, and her father loved her very much. When but a babe her mother had been drowned at sea. A little brother also had gone by the sea. One winter's night her father, out in his fishing-boat, struck a reef. The teeth of the reef crunched the boat, and the sea swept the splinters on. Next morning his body was washed ashore scarce thirty yards from the door of his home. The daughter, as was the custom of the folk, watched by her dead father until the day of burial. Following the interment, she went to her bed and slept till dark, then arose; and lighting an oil-lamp, she stood it in the window, where it might feebly shine out on the voe, and sitting down at her spinning-wheel she spun till the morning light. For forty years did she tend her little lighthouse. From fair maiden-

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hood till her hair grew white did she keep her lamp burning. Mariners and fishermen passing knew they could always depend upon that light. Always would they look for it, and never did they find it gone out. On treacherous nights they would head for it, and then steer into the safe voe beyond; and not one failed to send heavenward heartfelt thanks for the little lighthouse and its keeper. Never on earth did she know of the lives she saved and the wrecks that were averted because of her sacrifice. Every night she spun so many hanks of yarn for her daily bread, and one hank over to buy oil for the lamp. In those days there were no lights on the Shetland coast.

Were a straight line to be drawn out of Gonnafirth, Olnafirth, and Busta Voes, and also along the sound that lies between Muckle Roe and Papa Little, the point of convergence would be found in the Island of Linga. Linga is a solitary isle—a lone monitor. In winter it is bleak and desolate, and covered with snow; but in summer, a purple gem in the setting of a sap-

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phire sea. Geographically it is a perfect circle, and always it has been uninhabited except by sheep, though 't is said that it is the rendezvous of trolls. ("Ole Jamesina Mouat" to this day tells of seeing the trolls sitting round a blue fire on the crest o' Linga one Halloween; and I know that since that night, in the firm belief of this strange hallucination, she has never left her shack in the dark without a blazing peat in the claws of a pair of tongues.) Directly south of Linga is Cole Ness, and the first house one comes to on the summit of this headland is designated "The Moon." It is an ideal little home and reminds one of the lines:

"The cottage was a thatched one;
The outside old and mean;
But everything within that cot
Was wondrous neat and clean."

Now, "The Moon" is rightly named, because it is situated at a great height. The stranger, by reason of the way he pants and blows on getting there, concludes on the spot that a better name could never have been given. But

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this house is not only like the moon because of its altitude; it is also like it because of its kindliness. There never was or ever will be a kindlier home than "The Moon." The folks who dwell there are a family of three: Jessie Christiansen (the mother), and Christina and Helga, her daughters. It must also be told that in this home there are four chairs—one a vacant chair—and the tragedy and grit connected with the vacant one are the kernel of this account.

One evening, just as the sun was going down, a letter was left at "The Moon" by the carrier of rural mails. It bore a foreign postage-stamp and was marked "Thorshaven." Its import was this: Magnus Christiansen (the father and only bread-winner) had met his death at the "north fishing," having found a watery grave off the bitter Faroe coast. The schooner on which he had sailed—*Faroe Belle*—in a gale had struck the "Little Diamond" (a rock) and foundered with all hands.

At this very time a famine was raging in Foula, and sore was the distress in other parts

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of the land. But in poor, isolated Foula it was doubly sore. There the fish had failed, and the lean grain of their crofts had perished. Men grew weak with pining; mother's breasts were dry; babes and children were dying; it was verily a grievous time. With this darkness already hanging o'er the land, the reader will be quick to see what a terrific blow the contents of this foreign missive brought to the inmates of "The Moon."

But the widow and her girls were the sort the sea rears; they were Norse to the bone and had the hero blood of sea kings coursing warm through their veins. While I know that their eyes were wet with tears for many a day, I know, too, that their teeth were grit and their spirits singing with an intrepid optimism. With determination as flint did they set to work with the spade and the needles, and barely at times, yet surely, the ghost of starvation was kept at bay. No pen can ever tell of their struggle, no, nor yet of their victory. It was a struggle of sweat and blood, but to-day they live to sing of their triumph. And be it said

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to their honor that while all they possess has been toiled for hard and long, there is not a home in all the world more beneficent than "The Moon." Ever the table is spread, and always the kettle goes on.

The Shetland people are great believers in Providence and in "guardian angels." They believe, also, "that the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect towards Him."

During the spring of 1866 a whaling vessel of the name of *Diana* left the port of Hull for the coast of Greenland. On her way up she called at Lerwick for men who were skilled in the work of the Great White North. No sooner were they secured and aboard than she put out on her way again. What sort of catch they had that summer the writer does not know, but for some reason or other, instead of running south ere the ice set in thick, the *Diana* lingered, and lingered too long. All through the long, dark winter she stayed, frozen in the

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grip of the ice. As time dragged on, provisions grew less, and soon there hovered o'erhead the shadow of grim death. One brave fellow after another died, and when the sun of the spring broke up the ice and liberated the *Diana* she was her own skipper, for the few that were yet alive were unable to sail her. Unseen by all, another PILOT took the helm, and one day of the following year the *Diana*, with more of her crew dead in their bunks than alive, was seen gently gliding into Ronas Voe (Shetland). The Shetland people recognized her PILOT and have since erected a fountain at the pier-head of Lerwick, as a memorial of the *Diana's* providential return.

Near a spot where the heather blooms the bonniest and the sun sets the grandest there is built an old, old home. Gray and weather-beaten, with a straw-thatched roof, and looking as though it had been built a thousand years, it stands a memorial of by-gone days. All about the doorway and as far as the well are the usual slippery cobblestones. Near by

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are the cowshed and the barn, and some few yards from these, toward the shore, is the old tarred boat, which leans on its side as though its working days were o'er. To look at, this homestead does not seem worth a twenty-dollar bill, but its outside appearance is no criterion by which to judge the folk that live within.

When I get weary with the stiffness and conventionalities of our so-called civilization I fly in spirit back to Houbensetter, and again sit with Mother B——, enjoying her quaint talk and her "fly cup o' tea." I fancy that I see her now—crippled with rheumatism, eyesight poor, and sickly at times—sitting close to the fire, with a red-and-white handkerchief about her head, ever busy teasing her wool. The shine on her face seems to tell of the peace she experiences with God and man, and her wonderful contentment with the life of poverty and bitterness she has been called upon to live. In the home with her are two daughters, both typical "Shetland lassies."

This remnant of a once bigger family has a sad and touching history, one which tells of

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calamity, but also of magnificent courage. I tell it feelingly; it is sacred ground. One evening father and two sons pushed down the family boat and set sail for Voe, where a store is built and provisions kept. To reach that place they must needs pass through a peculiar sound called "The Narrows"—a deep spot overlooked by steep hills and notoriously noted for its reputation of disaster. When nearing this particular place, a flan of wind came sweeping down upon the little craft and overturned it. It was all so sudden, and there were none at hand to save. Henceforth in the home were to dwell a widow, two fatherless girls, and a fatherless boy.

There came another day, when the lonesome laddie was fishing just off from that homestead's door, and in some way mysterious his boat, too, capsized, and he was drowned before his mother's eyes. She, brave soul, rushed down to the shore, and, pushing off another boat, with Herculean strokes made to the spot where her boy was sinking; but all too late.

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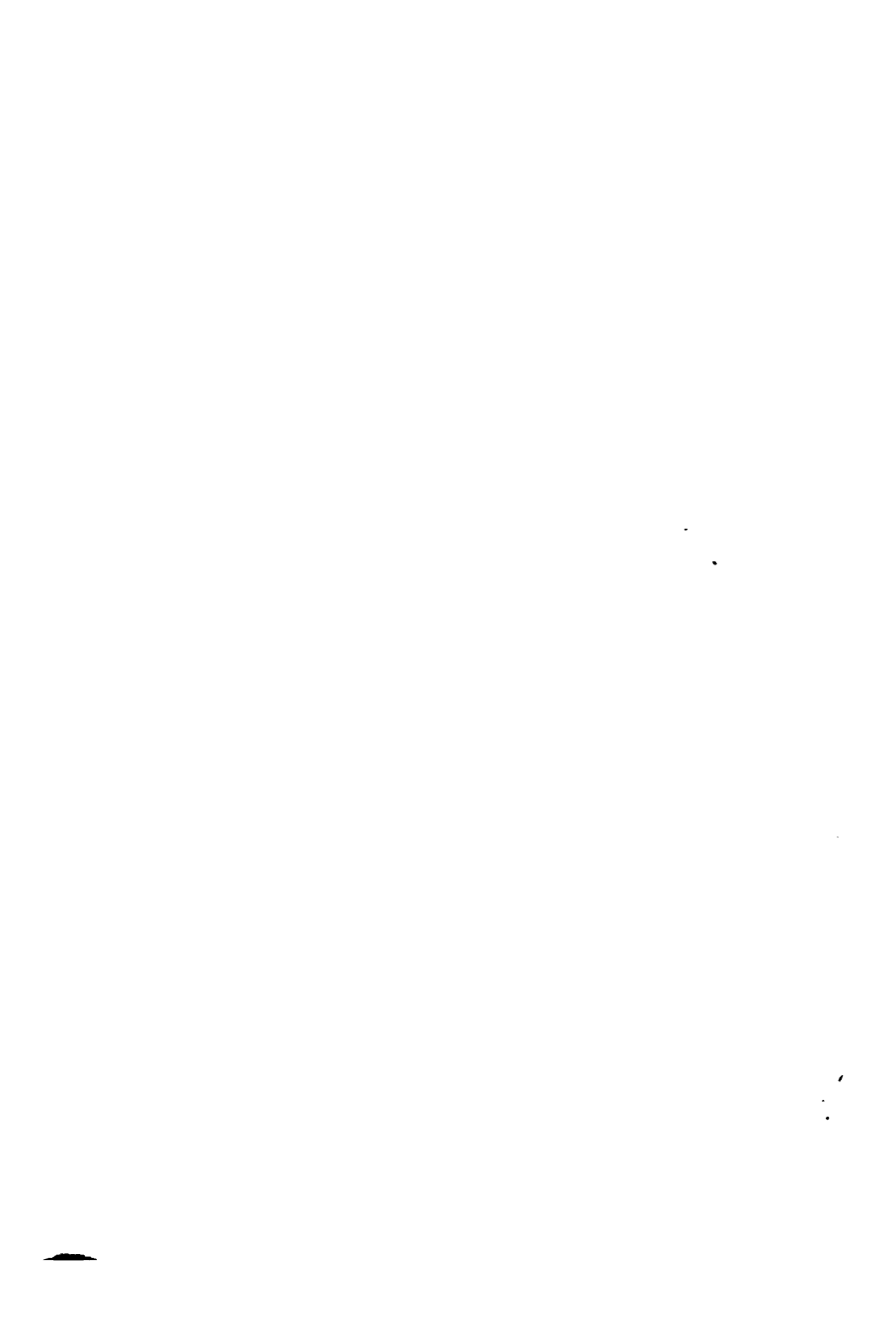
How unrelenting is the hand of fate! How stern are his decrees! The blows of the Stranger Death are hard blows anywhere, but their sting is keenest when at sea. So it was in this home. No cemetery have they to visit! No grave on which to lay roses—save the rolling face of the mighty deep. They can not mark the spot where the dear dead lay. Nor do they hear grand organ wail out its funeral elegy—naught but the weird thundering of the angry sea. Methinks such calamity must have broken their hearts, but I know that while they will carry to the grave the soreness of the bereavement, the spirit of the Norseman was not wounded to the death.

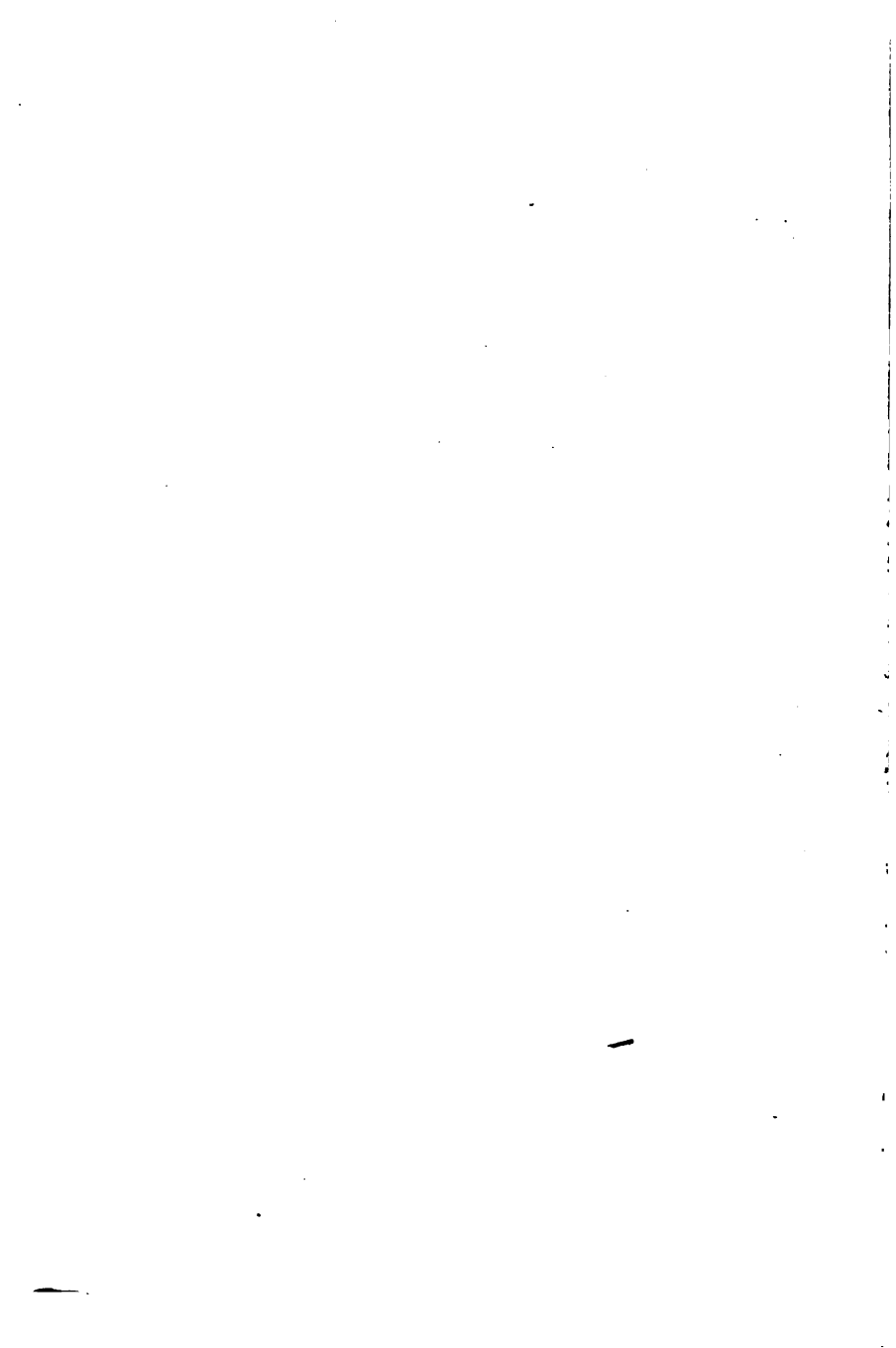
It is now years since all this happened, but from those days to these, these three have fought a great fight. With viking courage and grit invincible they are winning to this day. Mother B—— is now old and feeble, and the lassies keep the home together. In turns do they go to the “gutting,” and together do they work the land—delving the soil, dragging the

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**harrow, cutting the hay, carrying the peats,
milking the cows, seeking the sheep amid win-
ter snows, and at night the everlasting knitting!
God bless them! aye, aye, God bless them!
The spirit of Grace Darling ever lives in her
sisters of the sea.**







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